

VOL. 111
ISSN 0032-6178



Rs. 8.00
Printed on 1 DECEMBER 2006

PRABUDDHA BHARATA or AWAKENED INDIA

A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



"As peak after peak of this Father of Mountains began to appear before my sight...the mind reverted to that one eternal theme which the Himalayas always teach us...which is reverberating in the very atmosphere of the place — renunciation!"

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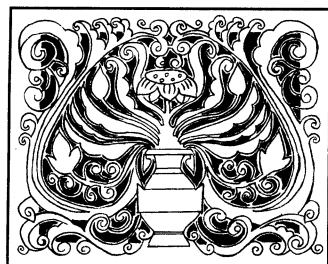
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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prabuddha Bharata

Advaita Ashrama

PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat

Dt Champawat · 262 524

Uttaranchal, India

E-mail: awakened@rediffmail.com

PUBLICATION OFFICE

Advaita Ashrama

5 Dehi Entally Road

Kolkata · 700 014

Phs: 91 · 33 · 2244 0898 / 2245 2383 /

2245 0050 / 2216 4000

E-mail: mail@advaitaashrama.org

Internet edition at

www.advaitaashrama.org

Cover:

Sunset over the Garhwal range, Himalayas.

Quote from Swami Vivekananda (CW 3.353).

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 111

DECEMBER 2006

No. 12

Traditional Wisdom

CAITANYA: CONSCIOUSNESS

प्रातः स्मरामि हृदि संस्फुरदात्मतत्त्वं सच्चित्सुखं परमहंसगतिं तुरीयम् ।
यत्स्वप्नजागरसुषुप्तमवैति नित्यं तद्ब्रह्म निष्कलमहं न च भूतसंघः ॥

At dawn I remember the Atman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, the transcendent abode of the wise, shining in the heart. The eternal witness of the states of wakefulness, dream, and deep sleep, that impartite Brahman am I, and not this conglomerate of elements.

(*Pratah-smaranam*, 1)

मनश्चक्षुरादेर्विमुक्तः स्वयं यो मनश्चक्षुरादेर्मनश्चक्षुरादिः ।
मनश्चक्षुरादेरगम्य स्वरूपः स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा ॥

That which, though itself free of (organs like) the mind and the senses, is the Mind of the mind and Eye of eye; whose essence is inaccessible to the mind and the eye; that eternal witnessing self am I. (*Hastamalaka Samvadah*, 6)

मासाब्दयुगकल्पेषु गतागम्येष्वनेकधा । नोदेति नास्तमेत्येका संविदेषा स्वयंप्रभा ॥

Through the many months, years, ages, and world cycles, those that are past and those yet to come, the one Consciousness remains the same, neither setting nor rising, for (unlike the sun) it is self-luminous. (*Panchadashi*, 1.7)

एष आत्मा स्वयंज्योती रविसोमाग्निवाक्षु यः । यातेष्वस्तं दृशैवास्ते भासयंश्चित्तचेष्टितम् ॥

This Atman, the self-luminous light, continues to exist as the power of seeing, revealing the activities of the mind, even when (the lights of) the sun, moon, fire, and speech have set. (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Bhashya Vartika*, 4.3.112)

I find sometimes that living beings are like so many pills made of Indivisible Consciousness. ... At one place I ran to the meadow to see how living beings are sustained. I saw ants crawling there. It appeared to me that every place was filled with Consciousness. (Sri Ramakrishna)

∞ This Month ∞

Discussions on consciousness, mentality, and related themes bring science and spirituality face-to-face. But do they also form a common meeting ground? The articles in this number should set you thinking. **Science and Spirituality: Where Do They Meet?** is our editorial opinion.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago takes a leaf out of Sister Nivedita's memorable work *The Master as I Saw Him*.

Artificial intelligence, brain sciences, and psychology of mind are closely allied disciplines. And they deal with a subject in which Vedanta has a stake too: the structure and function of the mind. The insights into the mind provided by these disciplines is reviewed by Swami Sarvottamananda, Dean of Research, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKM VERI) in **On Mind, Brain, and Computers**.

In **Consciousness Revisited**, Dr Lekshmi Ramakrishnaier takes a close look at methodological problems in the study of consciousness, the objective theories and approaches to consciousness, and how Yoga provides fundamental insights into the nature of consciousness as well as its objective correlates. The author is Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram.

Our perceptual world is mediated by our senses—their structural idiosyncrasies, functional limitations, and the specific ways in which sense data are presented to them. The 'objective' world may well be 'unknown and unknowable'—something of which we are usually unaware. Dr Rebanta Bandyopadhyay, Director, Discovery Research, Dr

Reddy's Laboratories, Hyderabad, reminds us of this in **Fallacy of Perception**.

Vidya and Avidya is a lucid review of the Upanishadic concepts of wisdom and ignorance, of mediate knowledge and the immediacy of transcendence. Swami Vipashananda, the author, is a monastic member of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal.

The ego is the source of desire, the cause of human bondage. But it is also a sure tool for unhinging our desires. These dynamics form the subject of **Ego and Desire** by Dr D Nirmala Devi, Reader, School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.

In the second part of his article, **Lead, Kindly Light**, Dr Vijaya Kumar Murty, Professor of Mathematics, University of Toronto, takes a look at some of the conditions that allow for the flowering of the light of the Spirit.

Dr Beatrice Bruteau concludes her study of the **Dancing Shiva and the Self-creating World** by examining how the awareness of divine creativity can transform human relations, property dealings, and ultimately, the social order. The author is a member of the Vedanta Centre of Atlanta and an adjunct professor at the Divinity School, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem.

Perchance to Dream: Sleep and Spiritual Life is a charming account of the deeper, the darker, and the lighter sides of brain research by Hiranyagarbha, a member of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood.

Thrown Out by Allah provides a glimpse of a little-known fakir by an anonymous monk.

Science and Spirituality: Where Do They Meet?

EDITORIAL

Any discussion on mind or consciousness must, of necessity, be marginal—at the margins of science, philosophy, psychology, and spirituality; and there are a host of other disciplines willing to pitch in. This is so, not because mind and consciousness are marginal to our preoccupations—there would not be any preoccupation without mind or consciousness—but because both consciousness and mind, though impinging on virtually every domain of human concern, continue to be poorly understood.

Margins are interesting because they serve as meeting places for domains with discrete boundaries. They also challenge us to look over our fences and confront different world-views. Entities or events taken for granted as facts in one domain often turn out to be less certain when viewed from another. Such contradictions frequently turn meetings at the margins into confrontations. And if the margin happens to be a crossroads, one may end up bewildered by the confusion of viewpoints. Science and spirituality form two such domains—domains that are usually snug in their own belief systems, that choose to meet each other only occasionally, and less commonly, find themselves at crossroads, challenging their own smug notions.

The Scientific and Spiritual Domains

The process of science is guided by reason, realism, and realistic reappraisals of its own position. The epitome of deductive reasoning is, of course, mathematical logic. By providing rigorous mathematical models for physical events, mathematics has often fostered the illusion that the method of the physical sciences is rational too. But the latter is essentially dependent on observation and experimentation followed by generalizations based on inductive logic. This is

undoubtedly a thoroughly realistic process, but it gets linked to rationality when mathematical or logical models are used to explain observed phenomena, generate hypotheses, and predict events. That the link between reason and the physical world is not a necessary or straightforward one is evidenced by the need to regularly update scientific theories based on observational or experimental evidence. These reappraisals become ‘revolutionary’ when a well-established theory is overturned or counter-intuitive theories get entrenched. The revolutions brought about by relativity and quantum mechanics are well-known examples.

The scientific method is essentially naturalistic, as it seeks explanations from within observed sense data and the realm of reason. Its domain is therefore distinctly different from the religious or spiritual, for the latter claims to explore and speak about supersensory or supernatural facts and events. A definition of the Vedas goes thus: ‘*Pratyakṣeṇānumityā vā yastūpāyo na budhyate, enaṁ vidanti vedena tasmād-vedasya vedatā*’; That method which is not known through direct perception or inference is made known by the Vedas; it is thus that the Vedas are repositories of knowledge.’ Acharya Shankara is equally categorical in his assertion of the domain of the Vedas: ‘The validity of the Vedas lies in revealing what is beyond direct perception. ... even a hundred Vedic texts cannot become valid if they assert that fire is cold or non-luminous!’

With such clear-cut territories, science and spirituality (or religion) should have little to argue about, much less quarrel over. But the supersensory realm often appears to impinge on the sensory, if not give birth to it (as is claimed by religion). So proponents of spirituality feel the need to explain the sense-world in terms of

their own paradigms. People of science respond to this intrusion in two ways: either they ignore it, and continue with their descriptions of the world as if the supersensory did not exist, or they try to debunk such spiritual claims in and through their theories and observations, often forgetting that these theories are not formulated to handle such claims.

Another, and a more friendly, response is to see one's claims verified in the propositions and findings of the other. Thus some science writers see the holism of Eastern religions reflected in the behaviour of matter at the quantum level, while some Eastern spiritual thinkers treat the relativity and quantum theories as modern illustrations of the theory of maya. Such assertions fail to carry much weight because they have little to do with the ingredients that give both science and spirituality their power: the ability to generate useful technology (the spiritual domain too has its technical sophistications) and make valid predictions. It would therefore be useful to examine the fundamental sources of scientific and spiritual power.

The Scientific Discipline

In his book *Inevitable Grace*, Piero Ferrucci has succinctly captured the dilemma of the spiritual person confronting the scientific world: 'What value is there ... in knowing how the scientific mind works and what it aims to accomplish? What does this path have to teach to someone who sees science as an alien, perhaps even frightening, universe?' He then proceeds to answer these very questions: 'It offers scope for new, fertile attitudes and mental habits which are not limited to scientific practice but are the birthright of all intelligent minds: the honesty inherent in confronting facts, the discipline of precision and focus, the resolve never to take anything for granted, the ability to see hidden resemblances, a feeling for conceptual elegance, the art of thinking in a coherent way, wonder in the face of mystery.'

All this sounds very nice, and most of us

would like to imagine ourselves fulfilling all these criteria and being scientists in our own right. But we would do well to remember what the famous physicist, Richard Feynman, said during a lecture at a university in Brazil several decades ago (and he could well have said the same thing in India): 'The main purpose of my talk is to demonstrate to you that *no* science is being taught in Brazil!' observed Feynman, and this is what he had to say about what followed: 'I can see them stir, thinking, "What? No science? This is absolutely crazy! We have all these classes."

'So I tell them that one of the first things to strike me when I came to Brazil was to see elementary school kids in bookstores, buying physics books. There are so many kids learning physics in Brazil, beginning much earlier than kids do in the United States, that it's amazing you don't find many physicists in Brazil—why is that? ...

'Then I held up the elementary physics textbook they were using. "There are no experimental results mentioned anywhere in this book, except in one place where there is a ball, rolling down an inclined plane, in which it says how far the ball got after one second, two seconds, three seconds, and so on. The numbers have 'errors' in them—that is, if you look at them, you think you're looking at experimental results, because the numbers are a little above, or a little below, the theoretical values. The book even talks about having to correct the experimental errors—very fine. The trouble is, when you calculate the value of the acceleration constant from these values, you get the right answer. But a ball rolling down an inclined plane, *if it is actually done*, has an inertia to get it to turn, and will, *if you do the experiment*, produce five-sevenths of the right answer, because of the extra energy needed to go into the rotation of the ball. Therefore this single example of experimental 'results' is obtained from a *fake* experiment. Nobody had rolled such a ball, or they would never have gotten those results!'

Feynman's opinion was confirmed by his

experience with the students in Brazil: At one examination 'one of the students was absolutely super: He answered everything nifty! The examiners asked him what diamagnetism was, and he answered it perfectly. Then they asked, "When light comes at an angle through a sheet of material with a certain thickness, and a certain index N, what happens to the light?" "It comes out parallel to itself, sir—displaced." "And how much is it displaced?" "I don't know, sir, but I can figure it out." So he figured it out. He was very good. But I had, by this time, my suspicions. ... The first question I ask is, "Can you give me some example of a diamagnetic substance?" "No." Then I asked, 'If this book was made of glass, and I was looking at something on the table through it, what would happen to the image if I tilted the glass?' "It would be deflected, sir, by twice the angle that you've turned the book." I said, "You haven't got it mixed up with a mirror have you?" "No, sir!"

'He had just told me in the examination that the light [image] would be displaced, parallel to itself, and therefore the image would move over to one side, but would not be turned by any angle. He even had figured out how *much* it would be displaced, but he didn't realize that a piece of glass is a material with an index, and that his calculation had applied to my question.'

Science is about observation and experimentation, not about learning theories and formulae. It is about actually developing the attitudes Ferrucci mentions, not about being able to speak or write wonderfully about them. And this demands discipline.

The Spiritual *Adhikāra*

If the non-specialist speaking about science

can cut a sorry figure, holding forth on spiritual issues without a grounding in the subject can be equally naive. Vedānta is not so much about Brahman, Atman, and *māyā* as about the *adhikāra* or qualification to pursue the subject. This qualification involves a four-fold discipline, *sādhana catuṣṭaya*: discrimination (*viveka*), detachment (*vairāgya*), the six spiritually-favourable mental attributes (*śamādi ṣaṭ sampatti*) and yearning for spiritual freedom (*mumukṣutva*). Mental tranquility (*śama*), self-control (*dama*), withdrawal from sensual thoughts (*uparati*), forbearance (*titikṣā*), faith (*śraddhā*), and mental concentration (*samādhāna*) make up the six spiritually-favourable mental attributes.

These qualifications have been studied and expounded at great length. For our purpose here it would suffice to see the parallels that these have with the scientific attitude outlined by Ferrucci: discrimination is analogous to 'the art of thinking in a coherent way'; detachment to 'the honesty inherent in confronting facts' and 'the resolve never to take anything for granted'; the six mental attributes make for 'the discipline of precision and focus' in spiritual life, and *śraddhā* is 'wonder (rather than skepticism) in the face of mystery'. The desire for spiritual freedom is nothing but the desire to get over one's ignorance and is therefore shared by the scientist.

It is only when these qualifications are met (and rarely otherwise) that one gets a feel of the spiritual world—of its 'laws' and workings, of the 'hidden resemblances' and the 'conceptual elegance' that lie therein. Both the scientific and spiritual paths call for discipline and practice. A dialogue between these disciplines would have to begin with these basics if it is to be coherent and mutually comprehensible. *

The Scientific Attitude: Encouraged by the magnificent example of Pasteur, I have made it a rule to adopt the method of ignorance in my investigations of the instincts. I read very little. Instead of turning over the leaves of books, an expensive method which is not within my means, instead of consulting others, I set myself obstinately face to face with my subject until I contrive to make it speak. I know nothing. So much the better; my interrogation will be all the freer.

—Jean-Henri Fabre

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

December 1906

The Master as I Saw Him

The summer of 1898 stands out in my memory as a series of pictures, painted like old altar-pieces against a golden background of religious ardour and simplicity and all alike glorified by the presence of one who, to us in his immediate circle, formed their central point. ...

It would be easy to lose oneself here in the beauties of our journeys, in descriptions of mountain-forests on the road to Almora, or of cathedral rocks and corn-embosomed villages in the Jhelum Pass. For as one returns upon that time its record is found in a constant succession of scenes of loveliness. Not least of these pictures is the memory of the handsome old woman wearing the crimson coronet and white veil of Kashmiri peasants, who sat at her spinning-wheel under a great chenaar-tree in a farm-yard, surrounded by her daughters-in-law, when we passed that way, and stopped to visit her. It was the Swami's second call on her. He had received some small kindness at her hands the year before, and had never afterwards tired of telling how after this, when he had asked, before saying farewell, "—And, mother, of what religion are you?" her whole face had lighted up with pride and joy, and her old voice had rung out in triumph as she answered loudly and clearly, "I thank our God, by the mercy of the Lord, I am a Mussulmân!"

Or I might tell of the avenue of lofty Lombardy poplars outside Srinagar, so like the well-known picture by Hobbema, where we listened to discourse after discourse on India and the Faith.

Or I might linger over the harvest merriment of the villagers playing in reaped fields on moonlit evenings or talk of the red bronze of amaranth crops, or the green of young rice under tall poplars at Islamabad. Forget-me-nots of a brilliant blue form the commonest wild flower of the Kashmiri summer, but in autumn and spring the fields and river banks are violet-tinged with small purple irises, and one walk amongst their spear-like leaves as if they were grass. How infinitely tender are the suggestions of those little iris-covered hillocks rounding off the rise of some road-side against the sky, that mark the burial places of the Mussulmân dead!

Here and there, too, amidst grass and irises, one comes on groups of gnarled apple-trees, or pear, or plum, the remains of the village orchards which the State once upon a time supplied to all its subjects free of cost. Walking here once at twilight along the high banks of the river, I watched a party of Mussulmân herdsmen, crooks in hand, driving a small flock of long-haired goats before them to their village. And then, as they came to a knot of apple-trees, they stopped awhile, and spreading a blanket for praying-carpet, they proceeded to offer their evening worship in the deepening dusk. Verily, says my heart, there is no end of beauty, there is no end.

But in good sooth it is not of these things that I am attempting, in the course of the present pages, to speak. Mine is the broken and faltering witness of one who is fain to tell—not of geography nor of politics, nor yet of the ways and customs of interesting peoples and unknown races, but rather of the glimpses vouchsafed to her of a great religious life of the ancient order living itself out amidst the full and torturing consciousness of all the anomalies and perplexities of the Modern Transition. ... I see in him the heir to the spiritual discoveries and religious struggles of innumerable teachers and saints in the past of India and the world, and at the same time the pioneer and prophet of a new and future order of development. ... And I pray only to give always true witness, without added interpolation or falsifying colour.

—*Sister Nivedita*

On Mind, Brain, and Computers

SWAMI SARVOTTAMANANDA

From the very dawn of thought, humans have had a deep desire to solve the mystery of the mind. The mind is said to be the agent of thought. It is therefore but natural and fit that it should itself become the subject of inquiry.

Humans wish to grasp their own nature, their essence: that which makes them different from other entities—both sentient and insentient—from beings, from automatons, from other machines. What is it that really makes for the difference? It is the ability to think consciously and reason deliberately that distinguishes humans from other forms of existence. This is what makes them unique.

That human beings are rational is a truism; the ability to reason formally and in an abstract manner seems to be completely lacking in all other living beings. There are certainly many other human capabilities, but the ability which most marks an individual out as truly human is this ability to think, deliberate upon, analyse and categorize facts, formulate ideas, and decide on a course of action. These are truly the results of a developed mind.

Before the advent of modern science there was a clear demarcation between the mind and the brain. This distinction has become blurred with the passage of time. But the study of the brain as a neural machine and the development of computers as automata have enabled us to make equally bold statements about both—about what could possibly be done by them and what limits are impossible for them to overstep. In the present article, we shall discuss the nature of mind vis-a-vis the brain and computers. Such a comparison presumes a general equivalence of brains and computers and models the brain as a huge biological computer, with perhaps consciousness added.

On Mind

What Is Mind?

Although the singular ability to think is generally attributed to the human mind—this is what is meant when we say that mind is the agent of thought—there is a lot of debate in the cognitive sciences on the nature of this term: does a separate entity termed ‘mind’ exist, or is this just a linguistic convenience, some brain functions being traditionally confused with mind? Though divided in its opinion, the scientific community generally prefers to think that mind may not exist as a separate entity. There are two reasons for this thinking: one, the principle of simplicity makes the mind a redundant entity if brain function can explain it, and two, there is no definite sensory proof for the existence of mind; we have instead only certain beliefs and mundane evidence that is circumstantial at best.

Vedanta, in its psychology, accepts the existence of mind as a separate material entity. Western philosophers and theologians, in contrast, believe that the mind, if it exists, is non-material. According to them, all that is material belongs to the physical body. The mind, on the other hand, is considered to be part and parcel of the soul, or even to be the soul itself; and it definitely has a non-material existence. But if we agree to this view of mind being non-material, then several problems crop up.

Why Mind Cannot Be Non-material

One problem, traceable to Greek psychology, science, and theatre is that of *deus ex machina*, God playing the machine, whereby a supernatural intervention saves a hopeless situation. But in the ultimate analysis only a machine can work on another machine. Thus, if

the mind is not itself a physical machine in one way or another, then it cannot in any way work on the body, which is undoubtedly a machine, to get sensible results.

Take, for instance, the mundane desire to stand up or sit down. When this desire arises in the mind, it can have no way to get transformed into a suitable action. How can a mind that is non-material, that is not physically linked to the body, drive it in any way to make it either stand up or sit down? By what means could it be tied to the body so as to be able to exercise its pull or push?

The second problem with mind being non-material is that it cannot then store anything of the nature of information. In nature, wherever any information is stored, it is always stored in two ways: as different states of physical entities, or as variations in their arrangement or spatial order. Now, if mind does not have any matter in it, then it naturally follows that it cannot contain any information of the nature of *samskaras* (past impressions), as it will always be in the same state, and there is no possible arrangement of matter or energy that one can think of in an immaterial object.

The third objection, which is raised by Vedanta, is that any non-material thing is without form. This makes a non-material mind either infinite in dimension or merely a single point. Both possibilities give rise to serious conceptual problems. There are very few 'really real' entities in the world which are either infinite or mere points. I can only think of two: time and space. There might be a few other such entities, but mind surely does not seem to be one of them.

What if Mind Is Material?

If mind is material, then we have a host of other related questions to answer. Can the mind have an existence separate from the body? How does it function? How is it formed? Of what material is it made? Why is it not observed when it comes out of the body? In which part of the body does it reside? How is it connected

with the brain, that is, how do thoughts translate into actions? To answer each of these questions, earnest and sincere scientific and philosophical inquiry is required. I very much doubt if there is even a semblance of unanimity on these issues as yet, even after several millennia of unbroken discussion.

Another extreme position is taken by empirical scientists. They are of the view that mind is just a function of the brain, that it does not have a separate existence, and that dies its ignoble death with the death of the body. Needless to say, Vedanta does not subscribe to this view, even though neither the hypothesis nor its converse has been proved in any scientific fashion. We shall touch upon this topic again in another section below.

Capabilities of Mind

Vedantic thinkers classify mental function into four basic categories: *samkalpa-vikalpa* (cogitation, in the mode of *manas*), *niscaya* (ascertainment or determination, in the *buddhi* mode), *ahamkāra* (ego), and *smṛti* (memory as *citta*). Thus, apart from the faculty of thought, the mind is supposed to have a sense of identity, an ego or I-sense. Furthermore, it has the capacity for introspection, which computers are said not to have. In the case of the brain it is difficult to say whether it is able to introspect or not.

It is the contention of the artificial-intelligence community that the ability of one part of the brain to observe the thought processes of the rest can be termed introspection. Moreover, at most times, this ability manifests itself not as true self-observation from a detached (or outsider's) standpoint but as a sort of recollection of the past or as planning for the future.

Mind is also said to be a reservoir of *samskaras*, a technical term for inherent tendencies, which define human character, one's fate or destiny. According to Vedanta, the mind comes to possess these *samskaras* as a result of every good or evil action performed through the innumerable births that transmigrating living beings undergo. Sometimes the mind is also

said to be the sum total of all *samskaras*. When a person dies, the mind, as part of subtle body, takes these *samskaras* away with it in order to create a new body with the character of the original person at a suitable time. The fact that the mind is separated from the body at the time of death also makes the mind, along with the subtle body, an almost autonomous entity. It can have an existence independent of the body.

On Brain

What Is Brain?

Brain, in contrast to mind, is easier to explain. It is a living mass of neurons, interconnected by its many dendrites, passing signals from one nerve to the other all the time. Of course, believers in holistic science argue that the brain when taken as a 'whole' becomes something else, that it is more than the sum total of its neurons.

Interestingly, and this is just to counter naive holism, Sri Ramakrishna advocated judicious reductionism. One may recall his observations regarding how to have detachment through a reductionist analysis of the nature of sense objects. The Sankhya philosophy also refutes the possibility of *sat*, existence, emerging from *asat*, non-existence. Nothing extra comes out of a combination. This is in contrast to the Charvaka position where quantitative changes can have qualitative effects.

Capabilities of the Brain

The brain is exceptionally good at vision, audition, pattern matching, and speech recognition. It is also skilled at making run-of-the-mill generalizations. It is very curious that even though it is well known that any inductive inference based on a finite number of facts in a non-finite logical system (such as second-order formal logic) is surely no deductive logic, yet people are known to generalize on as much as a single fact!

Nevertheless, human brains are also exceptionally brilliant when it comes to constructing

models of reality. These models are obviously much more systematic than the world outside, which is but a jumble of objects and places, isolated facts, and unrelated incidents. The outside world is interpreted in the light of one's own model, which, for the brain that constructed it, corresponds to the outside world in its details.

It is to be understood that this model, since it is constructed by the brain, is not static. It is a dynamic model, and whenever a jarring event which cannot be explained by the existing model occurs in the external world, the model is systematically modified by the brain in such a way as to agree with the new (contradictory) fact.

In more than one way, brain process is similar to the trichotomy of *śabda* (the word), *artha* (the referent), and *jñāna* (knowledge). The model in the brain corresponds to the word, the external world to referent objects, and knowledge to the many interpretations of the model, or in other words, to the relation between the model and the objective world. It is worth noting that this is not a one-to-one relationship. This is why each person has his or her own personal model of the world and his or her own private interpretations of the events therein, no one model or interpretation being identical to another.

As a logical consequence of the discussion above, one question naturally arises. Are all brains equal in their capabilities? Do the brains of lower species have similar capabilities as those of *Homo sapiens*? Surprisingly, any brain is theoretically capable of doing as much as any other brain, only the brains of lower species do not have the necessary tools at their disposal. Their situation is similar to the case of a mentally challenged person who has neither a fine aesthetic sense nor the disposition to master the sciences.

Are Mind and Brain the Same?

According to Vedanta, anything other than the Self, which is considered real, is made of

matter, however subtle. In making this statement (and in all matters concerning matter), license must be provided to wave-particle duality and matter-energy conversion. Hence, mind, which is non-Self, is also made of matter. And as a matter of general agreement this material of the mind is taken to be subtle matter. The brain, on the other hand, is made of gross matter and is a part of the body. This is the chief difference between mind and brain.

Further, if the mind were just a function of the body, then we cannot explain with any clarity the four different states of mind: *jāgrat*, *svapna*, *susupti*, and *turiya*—the waking state, dream, deep sleep, and superconsciousness. For example, if the ego is the primary by-product of the workings of the brain, then what happens to it during deep sleep (when the brain is still working but the ego appears to be dissolved), and how does it suddenly resurface when one wakes up?

Interaction between Mind and Brain

A further problem is raised by the scientific-minded. Any stimulus requires that some energy be expended. Thus, for thinking, the mind requires some energy. Where does this energy come from? The mind must have some energy source of its own for its multifarious activities. If that be so, then there must also be transfer of energy from mind to brain all the time. This energy must surely be enough to excite at least one neuron, if not more. This makes the mind not so subtle after all.

Nevertheless, this natural interaction between the subtle and the gross does not create any difficulty for staunchly non-dualist Vedantins. The domain of maya is not always amenable to deductive logic, and moreover, no scientific system has been able to explain all known phenomena. According to Vedantins, the phenomenal world is a superimposition on the Self, and so does not affect the intrinsic nature of the latter. As a matter of fact, if in the future computers are shown to have intelligence, that would not detract from the Vedantic position,

for the mind, being material, is at par with any other material object in its potential.

Let us now make a bold leap into the symbiotic world of computers and brains. A few questions need to be articulated at the very beginning: Can a computer be intelligent? Is it capable of thought? Can it have emotions? Can it be moral or could it have a conscience? Can it be self-conscious?

On Computers

What Is a Computer?

The formal model of a computer is a Turing machine: 'a mathematical model of a hypothetical computing machine which can use a predefined set of rules to determine a result from a set of input variables'. It is provable that all computers presently known can be modelled on Turing machines. This is equivalent to saying, loosely, that given enough time and space a Turing machine can do anything that any present-day computer can possibly do.

A Turing machine as a formal construct is very simple to understand. It can be depicted by a reading and writing tape-head moving on a beginningless and endless tape made of discrete cells which are either blank or have one of a finite set of symbols printed within. The head is controlled by a program which tells it to read each cell, rewrite its content and move to an adjacent cell, depending on the entry in the scanned cell and the internal state of the machine, which itself can be changed based on the data on the tape. Every part of the Turing machine is finite; it is the potentially unlimited amount of tape that gives it an unbounded storage space.

Clearly, a Turing machine models human computing ability in several ways. Our brain is finite, just as the control program for the head is finite. The processing, the program, and the information of states all have correspondence with the various aspects of human memory and thought process. Furthermore, in doing arithmetic one does not have to do the whole com-

putation in the mind. One can use paper and pen to note down the intermediate steps; and there is obviously no theoretical limit to the amount of paper and ink one can use. This corresponds to the beginningless and endless tape that the Turing machine uses.

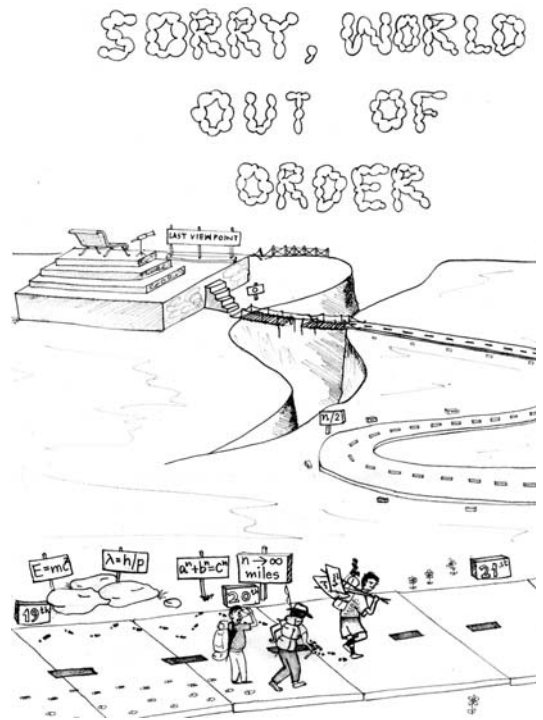
The Universal Turing Machine

Now there is an interesting corollary. The tape can also be thought of as some kind of memory. So the program controlling the head can also be written on the tape itself. This makes possible the construction of what is called the 'universal Turing machine'. This conceptual automaton need have only one program, which is capable of modifying itself to suit the needs of the problem under consideration. These problems can then be presented as other programs written as coded instructions on the tape. It can be shown mathematically that such a machine with only a single versatile program is capable of computing in exactly the same way as the earlier Turing machine. This leads to the important conclusion that all computers are inherently equal. Here we have a series of automata, constructed in a single pattern, but which can do a wide variety of tasks and have as varied a behaviour as possible.

What Is Artificial Intelligence?

Alan Turing (1912-54), who formalized mathematical computation, thus laying the foundation of modern computer science, was of the opinion that before the turn of the twentieth century computers would be able to think as humans think. But how can we know if a computer is thinking? Turing suggested a very simple test (called the Turing test) to ascertain if computers have 'real intelligence': Place the computer which is to be tested for intelligence in a closed room and place a person in another similar closed room. Now allow a tester, who does not know which room contains what, to ask questions of both and receive answers. This exchange, however, must be through a neutral transmission medium. The interrogator should

not get a clue to the identity of the replier from the medium of interaction (the person answering through a microphone and the computer



'How far is it?'
Human Turing Machine—Miles to go...

through a terminal, for instance). The human replier is expected to try to convince the judge through the answers given that he or she is really human, whereas the computer is to be so programmed that the judge cannot discern it to be a machine. To make matters more complicated, the computer is 'allowed' to give wrong answers similar to humans, feign ignorance, and also give delayed answers, giving the impression that it is thinking.

Turing himself suggested several objections that could be raised against this test; but all these objections can be adequately addressed. As matters stand, no computer till date has passed the Turing test satisfactorily, although there was an instance when a computer was able to successfully fool three judges out of a panel of five by wrongly answering some questions.

Capabilities of Computers

Computers are good at repetitive tasks. This is both their strength as well as their weakness. If you ask a computer to do a tediously monotonous task over and over again, it will keep on doing it without tiring or without ever following the 'human' way and doing things on its own. It does not undertake 'meta-thinking', that is, thinking as an outside observer or as a witness, as the mind does. Nor is it able to generalize and find out the general pattern of the task assigned to it as the brain readily does. However, computers are good at specialized tasks. If you give a computer a general rule and ask it to work out all the complex details, it will happily apply the rule to each and every special circumstance and get the required results.

Not surprisingly, as a result of their inability to generalize, computers are notoriously bad at pattern-matching. Within the time constraints allowed to them they can only do very basic analysis of speech and visual images. They can synthesize speech or images without much difficulty, but when it comes to analyzing speech and vision they have a very hard time doing it. On the other hand, computers can do arithmetic as no human can. A typical computer can add or multiply numbers consisting of tens of digits, at a rate of around a million operations per second. Moreover, computers can keep time with great accuracy. All their operations can be accomplished through a number of very accurately defined steps. Hence it is possible to ask computers to perform periodical tasks with great accuracy. A human being, in contrast, is forgetful and has to depend on external timepieces to know the time. It is very strange that despite its intricacy the brain has only a rudimentary sense of space and time.

Essential Differences between Computers and the Brain

The brain is a biological structure made of organic molecules, whereas computer chips are inorganic objects manufactured by etching circuits on the surface of silica chips. Thus the hu-

man brain, occupying volume, is a volumetric entity whereas a computer, as electronic circuitry on the surface of a silica chip, is an areal entity. This explains the vast processing power and exceptional capacities of the human brain.

Even though the human brain has got billions of neurons, each neuron has only a very basic processing power. Thus a brain can be thought of as a multiprocessor parallel computer where each processor is only capable of a few rudimentary operations, like checking if some signal is received or not. An average computer, on the other hand, consists of a single but powerful processing unit capable of doing hundreds of thousands of arithmetic computations in a fraction of second.

Is the Brain a Computer?

We have noted the architectural similarities between brains and computers. So is there really no difference between them? Are these two similar in all respects? Is the brain just a natural computer and a computer just an artificial brain?

Alan Turing is the co-proponent of another controversial thesis, the Church-Turing thesis, which states that anything that can possibly be computable physically, can be computed by a Turing machine. This has the far-reaching implication that the human brain may also be modelled on the Turing machine. Fortunately or unfortunately—depending on one's standpoint—no one has proved (or disproved) this hypothesis as yet. But it is a tribute to Church and Turing's genius that we have no better model for computation than a Turing machine till date.

It is true that, as a consequence of Godel's famous 'incompleteness theorem', there exist true statements which cannot be proven either true or false in any logical system. It is also true, from Turing's equally famous 'halting problem', that there exist problems which cannot be solved by any algorithm (program) used by Turing machines. But the same can be said for the brain too, human or otherwise. There is not a

single theorem ever proved by any mathematician which is not potentially provable by a Turing Machine.

We might be tempted to say that it is humans who have proved the incompleteness of logical systems and are therefore superior to these systems. Detractors would argue that one system of logic can also prove the incompleteness of another logical system. Only if a brain can prove its own consistency after formalizing itself or handle infinite calculations in finite time can it be said to be superior to Turing machines, not otherwise.

Uniqueness of Consciousness

According to Vedanta, mind has an existence separate from the body. But we must be careful to note that it may not have any special abilities which pertain only to itself and which are not materially replicable. In fact, Mother Nature regularly replicates the mind-machine in one form or another. The only special or unique (*vilakṣaṇa*) entity posited by Vedanta is the Atman or Self, which is existence, knowledge, and bliss absolute. And this is unique to the Atman.



'...but it insists on drawing portraits!'

If one were to contend that the light of the Atman is shining behind the mind then it can also be said that the same light is present behind computers. For the Upanishads say: '*Tameva*

bhāntam-anubhāti sarvaṁ, tasya bhāsā sarvam-idam vibhāti; That shining, everything else shines; by that Light is lit up this objective world in its entirety.' If we say that there is a difference in the intensity, that there is greater expression of this light in the mind than in gross matter, then this is exactly the point, there is only a difference in degree but not in kind.

Vedantic theory will not be challenged if in future computers come up with real intelligence, originality, or 'brilliance'. Only a few years back it was thought that computers could not play chess, and now computers have decisively proved this wrong. The Vedantic model of the mind would however be shaken if evidence can be brought to show that the mind is but a shadow of brain function and that there is no transmigration of the mental apparatus.

Even though the mind is in all likelihood separate from the brain, it still seems logical to assume that it may not be in a position intrinsically superior to computers. This assertion, in all frankness, is open-ended. In all probability it is superior, but we may discover in the future that it is not quite so. For instance, it might be possible in future for computers to show practical intelligence and even to effectively simulate a personal identity or human emotions.

But does that in any way decrease the glory of the Atman that shines behind the mind? Not at all, for the Atman is ever the witness, ever the subject, transcending thought, intelligence, and emotions, and is consciousness itself. Thought, intelligence, and emotions are in the realm of maya and therefore within the purview of matter. If computers are material, so is the mind. Theoretically, there is nothing to stop computers from taking a quantum leap and developing themselves into something which is at par with the mental aspect of living beings. If the mind, despite being material, is capable of thought, as well as moral and aesthetic appreciation, then so could be computers in some foreseeable future. This much could be said for sure, given the lack of conclusive evidence to the contrary. *

Consciousness Revisited

DR LEKSHMI RAMAKRISHNAIYER

*Human consciousness is just about the last surviving mystery.*¹

With the unceasing march of science and technology, human vistas of knowledge appear to have no visible boundaries. It makes the scientifically-minded feel that there hardly exists a problem that may be termed a mystery. But consciousness is an entity that still remains a mystery to contemporary philosophers, psychologists, neurophysiologists, and cognitive scientists. Today, anyone who wishes to do some serious thinking on fundamental human issues is prompted to revisit this 'new' (and yet, age-old) mystery.

What Is the Problem?

Imagine yourself enjoying the pleasant smell drifting from the gorgeous vase of roses placed on your table. The experience, of course, is something that is likely to remain etched in your memory. But what *is* this experience? One may not even be able to describe it to oneself, for this is an extremely private phenomenon and has a subjective quality all its own. These 'private qualities' are termed *qualia*. Our conscious experience consists of qualia. So the problem of consciousness can be formulated thus: how are qualia related to the physical world, or how does the objective physical brain manage to produce subjective qualia?

The problem of consciousness is a decidedly tricky problem. It seems to be presenting perpetually new and divergent facets to philosophers, psychologists, and cognitive scientists. Part of the problem is that in common usage the term *consciousness* is used very ambiguously. It is often contrasted with what is *unconscious* or is used as a synonym for 'attending to something'. But the problem of consciousness does

not fundamentally pertain to any of these. It is primarily about personal experience or subjectivity, or possibly a state transcending subjectivity, if such a state does exist.

What makes the problem of consciousness somewhat different from other mind-body problems? Consciousness is not synonymous with mind, which has its own distinctive meaning and functions. At the same time, consciousness is viewed by many as a by-product of the brain; and today our knowledge about the functioning of the brain, about neurotransmitters, neuromodulators, and the like, is increasing by leaps and bounds. We might have expected all this knowledge to have clarified the nature of consciousness, but it has not really done so. Not that we are ill-equipped to understand the ways and functions of the human brain—it may be that consciousness is something not amenable to brain science. This may actually suggest alternate modes of approaching the problem through first-person methods and spiritual techniques. This is what Husserl was suggesting when he wrote in 1929: 'If I reflect properly on my states of consciousness, I will be learning thus what is the nature of the psychical and comprehending the being of the soul, and when I follow this procedure to the very end, I am face to face at last with the ultimate structure of consciousness.'² We could call the above-mentioned two views the objective and subjective accounts respectively. We must see how consciousness is discussed by the advocates of these two approaches.

Third-person Approaches

Most contemporary philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists have taken the third-person approach towards consciousness. In their explorations, consciousness has come

to be divided into categories like phenomenal consciousness and access consciousness. The American philosopher Thomas Nagel has introduced a useful expression to describe what *phenomenal consciousness* is: an experience is phenomenally conscious if there is something that it is like to have that experience.³ In the example of the roses cited above, there is something that it is like to experience the smell of roses. Phenomenally conscious experiences have the special properties called qualia. Another variety of consciousness discussed by modern thinkers is *access consciousness*. A mental state is access conscious if it is available for the rational control of speech and behaviour and can play a role in reasoning (163). For instance, someone may not be able to answer the question 'Which city is the capital of Portugal?' but nevertheless be able to answer the question 'Is Lisbon the capital of Portugal?' In this case, the information about the capital of Portugal is said to be *accessible*.

It is important to note that the concept of access consciousness is quite distinct from that of phenomenal consciousness. Let me illustrate this point: Imagine a robot. It might believe that it is about to be attacked, and that belief might rationally control its actions, its speech, and such other programmed functions. This means that it might be access conscious of being under attack—but it may not be phenomenally conscious. Though we can develop hypotheses about how access consciousness is achieved, when it comes to phenomenal consciousness, we have very few ideas. In fact, we have no idea how the brain generates phenomenal consciousness. David Chalmers, a contemporary Australian philosopher, has called the challenge of explaining how the brain gives rise to phenomenal consciousness *the hard problem*: 'If any problem qualifies as the problem of consciousness, it is this one. ... even when we have explained the performance of all the cognitive and behavioural functions in the vicinity of experience—perceptual discrimination, categorization, internal access, verbal report, there may

still remain a further unanswered question; why is the performance of these functions accompanied by experience ...? Why doesn't all this information processing go on in the dark, free of any inner feel?'⁴

Broadly speaking, phenomenal consciousness challenges physicalism in two ways. First, it presents a metaphysical challenge: Can qualia be accounted for in purely physical terms? Second, it presents an epistemological challenge: Even if we accept that qualia are, in fact, physical, can we understand how the brain generates phenomenally conscious experiences? This distinction was explicitly stated for the first time by the American philosopher Joseph Levine.

The 'Mary thought experiment' suggested by the philosopher Frank Jackson is an argument to press the metaphysical challenge of qualia.⁵ Mary is a super-scientist who has been raised from birth in a black-and-white room. In the room she learns all the physical facts of relevance to human colour vision. One day she is let out of the room and sees a ripe tomato in good light. 'Wow!' she says, 'Now, I know what red looks like!' It is only now that Mary has experienced the quale of redness. This knowledge is something fundamentally new: what red is *like*. No amount of knowledge about physical facts could have prepared her for the raw feel of what it is like to see red. Mary knew how the brain discriminated stimuli, integrated information, and produced verbal reports. She also knew that colours were names for specific wavelengths in the spectrum of light. All these are the *easy problems* of consciousness. Yet she did not know what colours actually looked like. Thus it follows that 'there are facts about conscious experience that cannot be deduced from physical facts about the functioning of the brain'. Jackson is a *property dualist* as far as qualia are concerned. To him qualia are the non-physical properties of the brain.

Then there is the epistemological side of the problem. Think about a painful experience. Brain scientists would equate this with the rapid firing of neurons in a certain part of the

brain. But this does not explain 'painfulness'. Philosophers like Thomas Nagel and Joseph Levine have argued that there is an *explanatory gap* between the neuronal firing and the experience of painfulness. According to Levine, phenomenal properties like painfulness (a quale) are simple in that they have no structure. He goes on to assert that the lack of structure exhibited by qualia generates the explanatory gap.

Having reviewed the hard problem and the explanatory gap, let us now take a look at the alternate approaches to consciousness.

First-person Approaches

First-person approaches to consciousness are inextricably bound up with the concept of self. The notion of self gains importance in the problem of consciousness because it seems logical that there be someone who is having the experience, that there cannot be experiences without an experiencer. Our experiencing self seems to be at the centre of our personal world, is self-aware at any given time, and continues to be so from one moment to the next. In other words, it seems to have both unity and continuity. But the problem starts when one asks what kind of entity this experiencer might be.

In ordinary parlance, the self is the subject of our experiences, an inner agent that makes decisions and carries out actions, a unique personality. There are, broadly speaking, two types of theories about the nature of self: the ego theories and the bundle theories (98). The former hold that underlying the ever-changing experiences of our lives there is an inner self that experiences all these different phenomena. All ego theories are unanimous in their acceptance of the self as a continuous entity that is the subject of a person's experiences and the author of his or her actions and decisions. Ego theories include the Hindu theories of transmigrating immortal souls, Descartes' dualism, and most modern personality theories. According to bundle theories, the feeling that each of us is a continuous unified self is an illusion. There is no such self but only a series of experiences

linked together in various ways. There are experiences but there is no one entity which has them. Bundle theories include the Buddhist notion of *anatta*, Hume's 'bundle of sensations', and Dennet's 'no audience in the Cartesian theatre'.

Regardless of which theory of self we choose, we are confronted with the following problem: how does the brain generate phenomenally conscious experiences called qualia?

Yoga and Consciousness

What is needed for solving the above problem is a theory that can account for the real being of humans: a first-person account of human physical and non-physical ways of being. The philosophy of Yoga is one such clear account of the spiritual as well as psychosomatic being of humans.

Unlike other sciences which view humans as primarily psycho-physical entities, Yoga views them as fundamentally the Self encased in the psycho-physical system. So, in this system, consciousness is not taken as a by-product of matter, nor is the Self identified with ego. In Yoga, consciousness, which is identified with the Self (Purusha), is considered a fundamental principle constituting humans. The yogic concept of the human being can be explained in terms of the *koshas* or sheaths that have been elaborated in the Upanishads. Pure Consciousness (Self) is encased in the material vehicle of the five sheaths, the *panchakoshas*: *annamaya kosha* (the physical sheath), *pranamaya kosha* (the vital or energy sheath), *manomaya kosha* (the mental sheath), *vijnanamaya kosha* (the intellectual sheath) and *anandamaya kosha* (the sheath of bliss).

According to Yoga, our states of consciousness can be resolved into two 'parts'—permanent and changing.⁶ The permanent part is that pure Consciousness by virtue of which we have the notion of self reflected in our consciousness and are able to examine our own mental activities as witness. The changing part is that form of consciousness which is constantly varying ac-

according to the constant change of its contents. A fundamental characteristic of consciousness is that it undergoes changes of state within itself. We cannot distinguish states of consciousness from consciousness itself, for consciousness is not something separate from its states; it exists in them, passes away with their passing, and is submerged when they are submerged. It has been suggested that an invariable relation exists between matter and consciousness: 'a change in consciousness corresponds to the change in the vibration of matter (change in state and not change of place) and vice versa.'⁷ Thus the self (consciousness) becomes identified with whichever sheath is most active at any given moment.

Understanding Qualia in the Light of Yoga

For a better understanding of phenomenally conscious experiences (qualia) in humans, it is necessary to go through the yogic theories of knowing. Two elements, Purusha (Self) and Mahat (Intelligence), play key roles in the process of cognition. But neither, by itself, can serve as the subject or experiencer, for Purusha is external to phenomenal experiences and Mahat, being derived from material Prakriti, is incapable of any conscious experience. So the Sankhya philosophers suggest that conscious experience is elicited by them jointly.

The details of the process of cognition can be put in the following way: The object first makes an impress upon one or another of the senses, either directly or in a mediate fashion.⁸ Perception is effected by means of a psychic sign—an image or idea of the object in question. Mahat itself assumes the form of the object. The Purusha illumines the Mahat or is reflected in it; and the latter, though material, is fine enough to receive this reflection. Thus illuminated, Mahat serves as the conscious subject. Therefore, Mahat may be viewed as the physical medium for the manifestation of Spirit. In this sense, we may call their union the empirical self, as distinguished from the transcendental Self or pure Consciousness. Every cognition or phe-

nomenally conscious experience (quale) is a result of this blend.

The yogic theory of cognition seems to fill in the explanatory gap. But the yogi, unlike the neuroscientist, has visited consciousness through a different route. One needs to follow the spiritual path and practise meditation to walk this way. Of course, this is also a sure path to truth. Moreover, it also helps one understand what the real problem of consciousness is. Consciousness is no more viewed as a non-physical product of the brain but as the ontological principle that makes for human beings. Pure Consciousness, in fact, is not an empirical principle but the eternal, transcendent, and cosmic Self.

Towards a Broader Knowledge

The study of consciousness is unique. There have been arguments over whether consciousness can be studied from the objective third-person approach or from a subjective first-person approach alone. What appears to give these arguments their peculiar twist is the fact that in the study of consciousness the inner life itself is the phenomenon to be explored. Many important contemporary thinkers like Chalmers, Searle, Nagel, Levine, Pinker, and McGinn hold that consciousness has essentially a first-person or subjective ontology and so cannot be reduced to anything that has a third-person or objective ontology. Revisiting the 'new' mystery makes philosophers, psychologists, and scientists re-think the substantive claims of physical science and fosters the admission of alternate ways of enquiry in widening the domain of human knowledge. *

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The Brain Of A Poet

*As you know, dear friends, with poetry I've always been
obsessed,
But none of you have read my lines; you've humoured me,
at best.*

*I went to a doctor yesterday to ask about my verse.
I asked 'Is it bad?' He said 'My friend, I'm sorry to say
it's worse.'*

*After he scanned my tired brain, he sadly shook his pate.
'Your thoughts are "apoetical" and carry too much
weight.'*

*He put a finger to his lips, closed the office doors,
And softly said, 'A cure's been found for boring thoughts
like yours.'*

*'To make up now for all the fame and glory that you've
missed,*

*A transplant brain is just the thing: you must get on the
list.'*

*But how could poor aesthetic me afford this new grey
matter?*

*'Find someone less poetic who will pay you for your
blather.'*

*That's never worked before, so I went to a poet I knew.
'Be kind to me, O Great One, and let me learn from you.'
'You're wasting your time and mine,' he said 'trying to
pick my brain.*

*I haven't had an original thought since Gandhi stopped a
train.'*

*I made my way to the shop of brains on the other side of
town*

*With its vast display of learned skulls from geniuses on
down.*

*Some brains were counting mango leaves, others were
plotting war,*

*And some were shouting 'hip-hurrah' while watching the
home team score.*

*Some brains belonged to heads of state, and some from
churches hailed;*

*A bargain bin held brains of politicians who'd been jailed.
Romantic heads there were, who had no need for any
brain,*

Their thoughts arising elsewhere, with every passing dame.

*Brains were lying on the sill, and some were by the door;
As soon as one was sold, they brought in dozens more.
But one was guarded in a case that bore the following
blurb:*

'Here Lies A Famous Poet's Brain. Please Do Not Disturb.'

*'Tell me, Sir,' I begged the clerk, 'is this a poetical head?
A brain that's Muse-inspired, on poetic matter fed?
I'll bet it's got a hundred verses etched in every crease,
Ghazals learned from hoary Persia, strophes from ancient
Greece.'*

*'O sell it to me now,' I cried, 'I've waited far too long.'
'Go home and save your breath,' said he. 'It costs more
than a song.'*

*Had he hiked the price way up, to trade upon my pain?
What on earth is so important about a poet's brain?*

*And then the clerk pronounced some words that burned
into my soul.*

*'Like politician hearts,' he said, 'poet brains are gold.
You can't afford a prize like this—so look, but do not
touch.*

*Poet brains are very dear, not having been used that
much.'*

*—Hiranyagarbha
after Saghir Khayyami, 'Magz-e-shayar'*

Fallacy of Perception

DR REBANTA BANDYOPADHYAY

Now and then, I like to visit a website run by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Boston: www.vivekananda.org. The adages quoted from various lectures and writings of Vivekananda serve as extraordinarily refreshing nourishment amidst the daily routine of life. The carefully selected excerpts call for reflection and thought. It was on one of these routine visits that I ventured a page further, wandered through the archives of lectures from the swami, and stumbled upon a few discourses on Jnana Yoga, delivered by Swami Vivekananda in London on 21 June 1896:

Great is the tenacity with which man clings to the senses. Yet, however substantial he may think the external world in which he lives and moves, there comes a time in the lives of individuals and of races when, involuntarily, they ask, 'Is this real?' To the person who never finds a moment to question the credentials of his senses, whose every moment is occupied with some sort of sense-enjoyment—even to him death comes, and he also is compelled to ask, 'Is this real?' ... So long as there is death, the question must come again and again, 'Is death the end of all these things to which we are clinging, as if they were the most real of all realities, the most substantial of all substances?' The world vanishes in a moment and is gone.

It is indeed fascinating to ponder over the experience that is life and question the reality of our existence. Not so long ago, a very dear colleague—a well acclaimed scientist in his own right—expressed his willingness to accept only that which has been proven by 'science'. It is not uncommon to come across others who subscribe to such extreme views, swayed by either blind faith or the strictest practice of science. While blind faith robs one of the joys of creative exploration, it is unfortunate that 'scientific proof' is severely constrained by the boundaries

of science itself. Science, as we practise it, is limited by the tools and means of the practitioner, just as expression of feeling is limited by the linguistic skills of the one expressing it. Emotions seen in expressive faces can rarely be put into words—as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. And there again, the pictures are only as good as the resolution of the projection, photograph, computer monitor, or eyesight of the observer, whichever the case may be. A magnified look can easily expose the distinct spots making up the image. But this view blurs the nuances of the whole. The stars and planets in the sky appear tiny to the eye, but we have come to know that they are not so! Trees at a distance, and hills and mountains that appear to be molehills, are larger than the eye would lead us to believe. In fact, whatever we see, touch, hear, taste, and smell—everything that we experience in our lives—is 'cooked', 'garnished', and served just right by (and for) our senses. For people like me, the senses are the tools to interact with the world outside. The sights that we see, the music that we hear, the food we taste, the cool refreshing breeze that soothes us in summer, are all experiences 'presented' to us. They 'appear' real but could well be otherwise.

Can you imagine losing your ability to taste sweetness? Delicious rasgullas would taste like bland spongy balls of cheese. Yet, we cannot attribute the quality of 'sweetness' to the rasgulla alone. Sweet taste is a culmination of the interaction between the syrup in the rasgulla and the taste buds on the tongue. If one of these is missing, there will not be any *sweet* rasgulla. Likewise, an animal whose eyes are capable of receiving and responding only to X-rays, and not to the frequencies of light visible to most of us, would see the rest of the animal kingdom as

walking skeletons that have come alive by some strange magic. Before the invention of microscopes, the existence of microscopic unicellular organisms could not be verified with certainty.

Yet, suppose some perceivers were only capable of seeing at an atomic resolution: they would barely notice the ordered teams of atoms that we call molecules. Molecules again combine to function as tissues and or-

gans of an almost infinitely larger organism: the billions and trillions of molecules that flock together as gases, liquids, and solid bodies of matter, and that respond to stimuli like light, electricity, and magnetism, would be but figments of the imagination for such perceivers.

Hence, this world as we experience it is only as much real as our senses allow it to be. The truth, as we experience it through our senses, is but the truth contained within the narrow boundaries that are defined by these very same senses. A green outside is real to the kid wearing glasses with green lenses, while it is equally unreal to those that observe with their bare eyes. The creation, this life, and all that we experience in it are but something 'outside', seen through coloured lenses. It presents itself in as many colours as you could make lenses: a multidimensional puzzle, a medley of 'real illusions' viewed with multi-coloured lenses!

As we start to come to terms with the fallacies of perception, our views about life tend to change. All attributes, relationships, boundaries are shaken to their foundations and begin to melt away. Blood relations are meaningless without the concept of blood. Beautiful scenery is meaningless if there is no scene to consider. Right and wrong are sundered perspectives of one and the same thing. Alas—for most of us the senses are still the limits of perception. It is not inconceivable that the limits of perception could be stretched by rejuvenating a dormant sense organ, at least by the few who appear to understand more than the rest of us about such

things. The five senses are, unfortunately, designed to function in such a way that only relative differences in stimuli can be perceived. Take the case of touch. We tend not to realize

that our body is constantly in touch with a gaseous atmosphere till there is a 'change' in air pressure—the wind blows, and we feel the breeze. The same applies to vision, smell, taste, and sound. It is only

the relative difference in stimuli that can be perceived. An absolute homogenous infinite that is changeless would not be perceived by these senses. In fact, the dimension of time, which is no more than an index for change, would cease to exist where there is no change.

The presence of an absolute is not implicit in our discussions about the relative and the bounded. We cannot, of course, deny it either. If attributes, boundaries, constraints that define distinct phases of matter exist and are true only because of perception, then one could presume that an absolute homogeneity exists beyond perception. Since, by definition, the perception (or measurement and detection) of the absolute cannot be undertaken in relative terms, most human beings are incapable of perceiving the absolute. To perceive *any* timeless, changeless, homogenous absolute one has to reach beyond the set of tools available to the average human. In fact, the only way to verify the presence of the absolute is by identifying oneself with the absolute. In absolute terms, where differences cease to exist, there can be no subject and object. It is all one and the same. *Aham asmi*.

Reason, perhaps, will have to stop here. Such cut-and-dry observations of the world and contemplation of what is beyond do not necessarily invoke the concept of a loving, caring Absolute. Neither do they provide for the existence of a benevolent benefactor, a leader, the overseer of this creation—a God, as most of us wish Him (or Her or It) to be. *

O, in me, the limitless ocean,
the wind of the mind
raises forthwith
the waves that are the world.

—Ashtavakra

Vidya and Avidya

SWAMI VIPASHANANDA

The terms *vidya* and *avidya* represent opposites. Vidya refers to knowledge, learning, and to the different sciences—ancient and modern. So avidya would mean the opposite—ignorance, absence of learning, and illiteracy. Mahendranath Gupta (M), the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was a graduate of the Calcutta University and served as headmaster in several Calcutta schools. On his second visit to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna asked him, ‘Tell me, now, what kind of person is your wife? Has she spiritual attributes [*vidya shakti*], or is she under the power of avidya?’ M replied, ‘She is all right. But I am afraid she is ignorant.’¹ That was a reply typical of his times. He took vidya, as we still do, to mean formal education. Later on M came to understand from Sri Ramakrishna that ‘to know God is vidya and not to know Him, avidya’. To know about the world and worldly things falls within the domain of avidya. This same interpretation is provided by the Upanishads too.

Para and Apra Vidya

In the *Mundaka Upanishad*, a student reverentially questions a rishi about Truth: ‘Revered Sir, what is that by knowing which everything (in this universe) becomes known?’² The rishi begins his reply by classifying knowledge or vidya into two categories: *parā* (higher) and *aparā* (lower). Apra vidya refers to the four Vedas and the six accessories of Vedic knowledge (the *vedāṅgas*): phonetics, the ritual code, grammar, etymology, prosody, and astrology. The compass is clearly very wide: the process of creation, the nature of gods and goddesses and their relation to creation, the nature of the soul and of God, the rituals that procure worldly and heavenly enjoyments, and the way of re-

lease from the series of birth and death; in short, religious or scriptural knowledge and the ways of living prescribed by different religions are all subsumed under apra vidya. Para vidya, the rishi informs his student, is that ‘by which the immutable Brahman (*aksara*) is attained’. This Brahman is imperceptible, eternal, omnipresent, imperishable, and the source of all beings. Scriptural study is apra vidya, secondary knowledge. To know Brahman (or God) directly and in a non-mediate fashion is the primary aim of life, and is therefore termed para vidya.

If the scriptures tell us about life, then what about the other sciences—physical science and technology, and the social and political sciences? They do play a very valuable role in our lives, and are classed as apra vidya. But they are secular sciences. What do we get through secular knowledge? Wealth, power, luxury, and pleasure, but not the bliss that results from spiritual knowledge. The apra vidya that comprises scriptural knowledge helps us know that this world is not the only world, that there are other divine worlds accessible to human beings. The keeping of religious injunctions and performance of scriptural activities are prescribed as means for attaining enjoyment in these higher divine worlds. But these gains are transient and ephemeral. However, if the obligatory duties prescribed by one’s faith are performed with the aim of cultivating love of God and love of people of all faiths, the performer gets his or her mind and heart purified, and can attain the realization of that immutable Brahman which secures eternal bliss.

The Upanishads remind people with dogmatic and fanatic tendencies that scriptural injunctions also lie in the domain of ‘lower knowledge’. The *Mundaka Upanishad* says that

people devoted to mere scriptural ritualism are 'deluded fools': 'dwelling in darkness, but wise in their own conceit and puffed up with vain scholarship, [they] wander about, being afflicted by many ills, like blind men led by the blind'. They think of their way as the best and delude themselves into believing that they have attained fulfilment, and so continue to suffer the ills of life (1.2.8–10).

Ritual, Knowledge, and Wisdom

The *Isha Upanishad* makes the enigmatic statement: 'Into a blind darkness they enter who are devoted to avidya (rituals); but into a greater darkness they enter who engage in knowledge alone.'³ Here avidya refers to scriptural rituals. But the term *vidya* is open to several interpretations. It could mean mere theoretical knowledge of the scriptures or meditation on various deities, which too has limited results. Even the highest forms of meditation detract from the knowledge that is para vidya, direct and immediate. A subsequent verse (11) points out that harmonizing rituals with meditation leads to the attainment of greater good—the relative immortality consequent upon identification with a deity.

Which then is the best way to wisdom? The second mantra of the same Upanishad announces: 'If a person wishes to live a hundred years on this earth, he should live performing action. For a man such as you (who wants to live thus), there is no other way than this, whereby work may not cling to you.' As an illustration of this principle of work one may cite the diverse methods used by Sri Ramakrishna to guide his disciples with varying constitutions. He asked his disciple Girish to do whatever he was doing but to surrender everything to the divine Will. He instructed Narendranath on the non-dual Reality, knowing him to be a fit subject for such instruction. In reality, it is not work that binds but the mental attachment to work and its fruits, the notion of doership and of enjoyment. Hence selfless action, done in a spirit of service, is prescribed by scriptures as sure means to the

highest good.

What is the best way to work and yet be free in this very life? This is the subject of the first mantra of the *Isha Upanishad*: '*Īśā vāsyam-idam sarvaṁ yat-kiñca jagatyām jagat; tena tyaktena bhuñjīthā mā gṛdhaḥ kasyasvid-dhanam*'; All this—whatsoever moves on earth—should be covered by the Lord. Protect (the Self) through detachment (which arises from this covering). Do not covet anyone's wealth.' The Shruti expressly states: 'all this'. Our usual notions about 'I' and 'the world' (that both are real) are incorrect, because these notions are changing continuously. Everything in nature, including ourselves, is subject to death and destruction. Even this earth, the stars, and galaxies are constantly undergoing destruction and rebirth. This is an undeniable fact. So this changing universe, and the 'I' therein, is to be covered with the idea of divine permanence (that is, Brahman). With this awareness that everything—I and the observed universe—is nothing but Brahman, detached action becomes easier and more natural. Enjoyment, which presupposes duality, is naturally renounced if we become established in this idea. That is the assertion of the rishis who have realized absolute Truth. Not only do we then become unattached, but we actually love this world as a manifestation of God. We then do our duties to protect the world and do not covet anybody's wealth, for this wealth too is God's.

Ignorance and the Self

Sri Ramakrishna says, 'The world consists of the illusory duality of knowledge and ignorance. It contains knowledge and devotion, and also attachment to "woman and gold"; righteousness and unrighteousness; good and evil. But Brahman is unattached to these. Good and evil apply to the jīva, the individual soul, as do righteousness and unrighteousness; but Brahman is not at all affected by them.'⁴ The categorization of 'woman and gold' as avidya raises the inevitable question (from a Brahmo devotee): 'Who is really bad, man or woman?' Sri Ramakrishna answers, 'As there are women en-

dowed with vidyāśakti, so also there are women with avidyāśakti. A woman endowed with spiritual attributes leads a man to God, but a woman who is the embodiment of delusion makes him forget God and drowns him in the ocean of worldliness. This universe is created by the Mahāmāyā [the inscrutable Power of Illusion] of God. Mahāmāyā contains both vidyāmāyā, the illusion of knowledge, and avidyāmāyā, the illusion of ignorance.'

How does one overcome avidyamaya? Through vidyamaya, for 'through the help of vidyāmāyā one cultivates such virtues as the taste for holy company, knowledge, devotion, love, and renunciation.' Sri Ramakrishna further explicates the nature of avidyamaya: 'Avidyāmāyā consists of the five elements and the objects of the five senses—form, flavour, smell, touch, and sound. These make one forget God' (216).

Both vidya and avidya are aspects of maya, the cosmic power of Brahman. This power does not however affect Brahman (or Ishvara) itself. For maya is under the control of Ishvara. But it is by maya that human spiritual knowledge is covered. Again, it is the vidya component of maya that is responsible for the generation of spiritual knowledge, while avidya, even as it covers spiritual knowledge, is the source of all secular knowledge and human discoveries.

So avidya is nothing but human ignorance about God's nature, by which one is perpetually deluded into doing the rounds of samsara, the cycle of transmigration. This avidya again is nothing but misidentification of real knowledge, which is one's real nature. Therefore, religious scriptures ask humans to purify their heart, mind, intellect, and ego. Real human nature is pure and divine; each soul is potentially divine. Maya personifies our illusory perception. This phenomenal world is the longest dream come out of cosmic mind, of which the individual is a part.

'According to the Advaita philosophy,' says Swami Vivekananda, 'there is only one thing real in the universe, which it calls Brahman; ev-

erything else is unreal, manifested and manufactured out of Brahman by the power of Maya. To reach back to that Brahman is our goal. We are, each one of us, that Brahman, that Reality, plus this Maya. If we can get rid of this Maya or ignorance, then we become what we really are.'⁵ While lecturing on 'The Real Nature of Man' Swamiji dwelt upon the nature of ignorance, avidya:

Ignorance is the great mother of all misery, and the fundamental ignorance is to think that the Infinite weeps and cries, that He is finite. This is the basis of all ignorance that we, the immortal, the ever pure, the perfect Spirit, think that we are little minds, that we are little bodies; it is the mother of all selfishness. As soon as I think that I am a little body, I want to preserve it, to protect it, to keep it nice, at the expense of other bodies; then you and I become separate. As soon as this idea of separation comes, it opens the door to all mischief and leads to all misery (2.83).

Swamiji also makes a distinction between objective knowledge that is in the domain of avidya, and para vidya, which is our very Self: 'Knowledge is a limitation, knowledge is objectifying. He [the Atman, the Self] is the eternal subject of everything, the eternal witness in this universe, your own Self. Knowledge is, as it were, a lower step, a degeneration. We are that eternal subject already; how can we know it? It is the real nature of every man' (2.82).

Transcending Maya

From the above discussion it is apparent that both avidya and vidya are forces, the two currents of one powerful Shakti, multiplied into many currents. This fundamental energy, or Shakti, is called maya, and is termed inscrutable because it is impossible to characterize it in definitive terms. The epistemological categories of knowledge and ignorance, as well as affective attachment, are its components. Maya is Brahman as power. The whole universe in its causal, subtle, and gross aspects, and as perceived by the senses, is maya.

Avidya does not always mean absence of vidya or knowledge. It also has creative or pro-

jective components that make for the cosmic abstractions of illusion, delusion, and confusion. In classical Vedantic terminology avidya has two forces: *āvaraṇa śakti* or the power of obstructing knowledge or consciousness, and *vikṣepa śakti*, the projection of individuality or ego. Similarly, vidya does not refer merely to epistemologically valid knowledge—perception, inference, scriptural testimony, and the like—but also to spiritual knowledge derived from intuition.

Avidya refers to a state of confusion, delusion, and illusion: no rational being would like to remain in such a state. Every human being would surely like to transcend this state. True. But how? One cannot transcend it by a mere wish. Attempting to rid oneself of maya while still in it is kin to trying to lift oneself by one's own bootstraps. Therefore, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna in the Bhagavadgita: 'This divine maya of mine, consisting of the guṇas, is hard to overcome. Those who take refuge in me alone cross over this maya.'⁶ Here submission to the divine implies not only devotion to the transcendent Reality, but also surrender of the ego, the key component of avidya. Sri Krishna says further: 'Ishvara resides in the hearts of all beings, causing them to move like puppets through maya. Take refuge in Him alone with all your soul, O Bharata; by His grace will you gain supreme peace and the everlasting abode' (18.61–2).

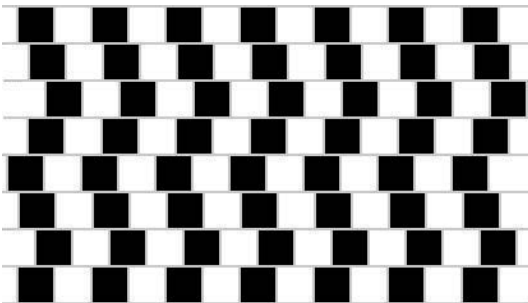
As noted earlier, vidya has two components: apara and para. The former consists of

words, sentences, and their meaning. Therefore, it is essentially word-power. It urges the human mind to activity. It functions not only on mental and intellectual levels, but also on the spiritual level. On the latter plane it comprises the spiritual power of persons who have experienced spiritual truths: such persons are called rishis, seers. That is how the scriptures of all religions retain the potential for transmission of spirituality. When a person utters, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' or '*tat-tvam-asi*; That thou art' or '*aham brahmāsmi*; I am Brahman', these sentences act to remove the ignorance covering the spiritual insight of the receptive heart. On the other hand, it is also through the power of apara vidya that people start riots, crusades, and wars in the name of religion. Therefore, true religion lies in the transcendence of apara vidya. That is the goal of human life. *

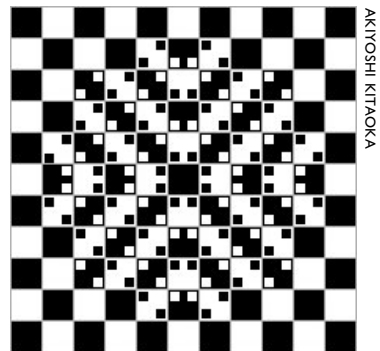
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Illusory Perceptions



Horizontal lines are parallel



An illusory bulge

AKIYOSHI KITAOKA

Ego and Desire

DR D NIRMALA DEVI

One of the special features of the Indian philosophical heritage is its unflinching faith in the primacy of the Spirit. All systems of Indian thought, theistic or atheistic, monistic or pluralistic, with the solitary exception of the Charvaka, accept that the goal or end of life is self-realization or moksha. If these systems were to assume that we have no freedom to break the shackles of karma, then there could be no hope of attaining moksha. Hence all philosophical systems except the Charvaka accept freedom as the very nature of our being.

The soul or Atman is ever-free and never in bondage. It is beyond such conceptual categories as existence and non-existence, affirmation and negation, identity and difference, one and many, purity and impurity, and is not subject to changes like production and destruction or increase and decrease. It is therefore beyond the grasp of the intellect, beyond knowledge and ignorance.¹

The seeker after truth needs to always remember the detached nature of the Self and give up all identification with the ego. It is the ego that brings the Self back repeatedly into the world of ignorance. It is from the ego that desires originate. When desires increase, activities also increase. And when there is an increase in activity, there is also an increase in desires. Thus desires and activities move in a vicious circle, and human imprisonment in the body is never ending. The destruction of desires has been described as liberation, and the person free from desires is called a *jivanmukta*, one liberated in life.²

Philosophers have pointed out that the ego can be characterized neither as real, nor as unreal—nor as both real and unreal. It is illusory in this sense. Liberation, therefore, is only the destruction of this illusion—the ignorance

about one's true nature. Vedanta tells us that bondage is really a delusion created by ignorance or *avidya*. This delusion is effected through the senses and the mind. The mind is perpetually active, and, being the seat of awareness, is also the mediator of all karma, yoga, and meditation (141). Hence, the first step in one's journey towards moksha is to tame one's mind, which is the master of all the senses. If the mind is brought under control then the senses can be subdued. Unless we achieve the capacity to control the mind, we remain in bondage.

The Nature of Bondage

All actions belong to nature; as such they are neither sinful nor meritorious. They only appear to be so when the ego thinks that the actions belong to itself. All the worlds posited in the scriptural texts are only diverse manifestations of the one Atman or Brahman. One need only shed one's narrow identity as an individual and see oneself as the Atman, and life becomes free of problems: 'While actions are being done entirely by the modes of Nature (the *gunas*), one who is deluded by egotism thinks, "I am the doer." But one who knows the true facts about the varieties of the *gunas* and of actions does not become attached, knowing that "it is the organs that are acting on their objects".'³

There are two levels of consciousness, two standpoints for viewing action—that of the soul caught in the web of its egotistic nature, and that of the individual working with the idea of the freedom of the Self. It is really the ego, not the true Self, which is subject to nature. When the self-awareness in one's consciousness identifies itself with the ego, it creates the appearance of an ego-self, as Sri Aurobindo says.⁴

Through the activity of the ego-self or the ego-mind, Prakriti (Nature) gets Purusha

(Spirit) to identify with all its workings. Thus the impure natural or objective consciousness clouds the pure consciousness of the Spirit. The result is that ego, desire, and ignorance come to govern the self, making it the natural being we all know.

Even after the truth has been known, there often remains the strong and stubborn notion that one is the doer of action and the experienter of its results. his notion has to be carefully removed by living in a state of constant communion with the Self. Only thus may one experience the bliss of liberation even while living in the body. The seeker must not be inadvertent about his or her steadfastness to Self-knowledge. Inadvertence is death. Inadvertence, delusion, egotism, bondage, and suffering are successive links in the chain of worldly life. If the mind ever so slightly strays from the inner Self and moves into the outer world it goes down and down, just as a ball, carelessly dropped from the top of a staircase, bounces from step to step and does not stop until it reaches the bottom. Knowledge of the Self is extremely subtle and cannot be reached by a distracted mind. It is realized only by noble souls of pure mind, and even by them only through extraordinary concentration.

Mastery over Ego

The Bhagavadgita points out that even a jnani (person of knowledge) is under the control of nature, for the very association with the mind, body, and senses entails participation in nature. So humans in general have to function within the web of their own egos. Through the ego one can enjoy a certain degree of freedom. But that freedom is very limited. It is this freedom of choice that we use when we decide for one thing over another. This freedom is governed by our samskaras (innate tendencies).

So, first of all, we have to get control over our mind. That will naturally lead us to gaining control over our desires, and then the senses, and finally the nature of the ego will be revealed too. We have to utilize the limited freedom

A man may keep his ego even after attaining samadhi. Such a man feels either that he is a servant of God or that he is a lover of God. Shankaracharya retained the 'ego of Knowledge' to teach men spiritual life. The 'servant ego', the 'Knowledge ego' or the 'devotee ego' may be called the 'ripe ego'. It is different from the 'unripe ego', which makes one feel: 'I am the doer. I am the son of a wealthy man. I am learned. I am rich. How dare anyone slight me?' —Sri Ramakrishna

available to our egos. One can utilize the freedom of the ego in a reverse manner also. This is emphasized by Sri Krishna in the sixth chapter of the Gita: 'One should raise oneself by one's self, not lower oneself; for one's self is verily one's own friend, one's self one's own enemy. The self is a friend to one who has conquered (the lower) self through (the higher) self; but for one who has not mastered the self, it acts like an enemy.'⁵

Our goal is to realize the Atman, and our starting point is the senses. Above the sense organs is the mind, and the mind is controlled by the *buddhi* (intellect). The *buddhi* in turn is directed by *ahamkara* (the ego), which is nothing but 'I'-ness. This *ahamkara* enables humans to take responsibility for their actions. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, a mature or ripe 'I' leads one to non-attachment or freedom, while an immature or unripe 'I' aggravates bondage.

Transcendence of the *Gunas*

All objects of the world—from the intellect down to ordinary objects of perception—are found to possess characteristics capable of producing pleasure, pain, or indifference. The Samkhya system of philosophy calls these the three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* respectively. These are constitutive of both Prakriti, the ultimate Substance or Nature, and the ordinary objects of the world. The *gunas* themselves are subtle and imperceptible.⁶ Their existence is inferred from their effects. *Sattva* has the func-

tion of illumination (*prakasha*) and is responsible for knowledge. *Rajas* is responsible for activity (*pravritti*). It is the cause of all painful experiences and is itself of the nature of pain. *Tamas* is the principle of passivity and negativity. It is responsible for sloth, inadvertence, and delusion. *Sattva* binds us as much as the other *gunas* do through its effect on the ego and its desires.

The Gita suggests the path of *nishkama karma* (selfless action) as a means to freedom. Character plays an important role in this process. Humans are born with many *vasanas* (instinctual traits). Desires sprout in tune with these instincts. One then works hard to satiate these desires. But, paradoxically, desires increase in proportion to the degree that they are satiated. This is termed *raga* or attachment. Obstructed desires lead to *dvesha* or hatred, which in turn provokes fresh scheming.

The cause of *raga* and *dvesha* is greed. Buddhist philosophers advise us to practise *trishna nirodha* (avoidance of greed) to weaken the bondage of desire. In the Gita, *kama* represents this *trishna*. Sri Krishna tells Arjuna: 'Kama is your enemy, born of *rajas*; you should kill this enemy.'⁷ If *kama* ceases to exist in the mind, then feelings like *raga* and *dvesha* will subside too.

Patanjali advises us to practise yoga to achieve this. Yoga here refers to *chitta-vritti-nirodha*, the control of all mental modifications. These modifications include the negative tendencies of *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (pride), and *matsarya* (envy). The person free of these tendencies is termed *sthitaprajna*, one of steady wisdom.

***Paurusha*: The Well-directed Ego**

Our *samskaras* determine our desires and personality traits. That is why we need to understand the dynamics of the *samskaras*. Yoga is the introspective method which helps in this process. Sri Krishna recommends the method of yoga to Arjuna for raising himself. Yoga involves exercise of will (*paurusha*). If a person

does not make proper use of the freedom of will or *paurusha*, then the ego will function as a hindrance to freedom. Such a person loses his or her freedom of action, because *samskaras* become more dominant than freedom of will. The freedom of the Self does not necessarily imply freedom of the will to act. True freedom of the Self is realized only through the exercise of the freedom of will, which is nothing but the freedom of the ego-self. Freedom of choice is the intrinsic property of the ego-self. By utilizing this limited freedom available to us we can give our egos a new direction, the direction leading to liberation from the bondage of desires.

The Indian rishis have given much importance to transcendence of *samskaras*. According to them, individual nature is moulded by innate tendencies, and tendencies are derived from the *gunas* evolved from Prakriti. Therefore, being subject to nature and being subject to the modes of Prakriti is one and the same thing. This subjection has been differently described as subjection to time, to actions, and to causality. So long as the ego does not actualize its potential to realize the true nature of the Self it remains a concealer. But when it transcends the bondage of *karma* by utilizing its freedom it works as a revealer, revealing the Self as essentially and eternally free. *

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Lead, Kindly Light

PROF. VIJAYA KUMAR MURTY

(Continued from the previous issue)

Spiritual Light Is Reflected in Varying Intensities

Both internally and externally, light manifests in different intensities. Both the sun and the firefly give light. Both the moon and the gem give light. But they are lights of different intensities. Just as external light is of different intensities, so is the light in the mind. A little light helps one to cognize but not to understand. More and more light gives one deeper and deeper understanding. And based on that understanding, we guide ourselves.

A small amount of light merely makes us aware of the encircling darkness. The firefly lights up a tiny sphere, but reveals the vastness of the darkness around it. The *Isha Upanishad* states that while ignorance puts us in darkness, a little knowledge puts us in greater darkness, as it were. Pandit Vidyasagar asked Sri Ramakrishna if God had given different power to different people. Sri Ramakrishna was amazed at his naivety.

Though it is spiritual light that manifests as perceived light, the two are incomparable, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'One ray of light from the Goddess of Wisdom stuns a thousand scholars'. Again, he says, 'Getting a ray of light from the goddess of learning, a man becomes so powerful that before him big scholars seem mere earthworms.'¹⁹

Scholarship sometimes obscures our understanding rather than clarifying it. One cannot see the forest for the trees, as it were. The obvious is missed. Both Christ and Sri Ramakrishna, as children, resolved issues which confounded scholars. With the light of wisdom, they were able to cut through the accretions deposited by intellectual arrogance. The Buddha

was also able to resolve scholarly disputes with his simple solutions. The following incident from Sri Ramakrishna's life illustrates how great teachers use this light of wisdom. Once, the priest of the Radhakanta temple at Dakshineswar fell while carrying the image of Krishna, and one of the legs of the image broke. Temple rituals are governed by many rules and regulations, and normally one consults certain shastras for these rules. But in unusual cases, when the written accounts do not offer any advice, scholars are consulted. Thus, a meeting of scholars was convened to determine what should be done. The scholars all agreed that the image should be discarded and a new one made. But being attached to the image, Mathur Babu and Rani Rasmani did not immediately act on this advice; they asked Sri Ramakrishna for his opinion as well; not because he was a scholar, but because they felt he had spiritual insight.

Sri Ramakrishna's answer surprised everyone with its non-traditional but utterly reasonable approach. He asked, 'If any one of the Rani's sons-in-law were to break a leg, would she forsake him and put someone else in his place? Wouldn't she rather have him treated by a doctor? Let it be the same in this case. Mend the image and worship it as before. Why should the image be discarded?'²⁰ This was so obviously correct that everyone wondered why no one had thought of it before. This is the effect of one ray of light from the goddess of learning.

We find another such example in the life of Swami Vivekananda. At the Parliament of Religions, as others gave big speeches, he sat there quietly, observing the proceedings. When he rose to speak, he did not expound big theories or doctrines. He simply told the story of the

frog in the well to illustrate why people disagreed with one another. The striking simplicity and relevance of this story was not lost on the audience.

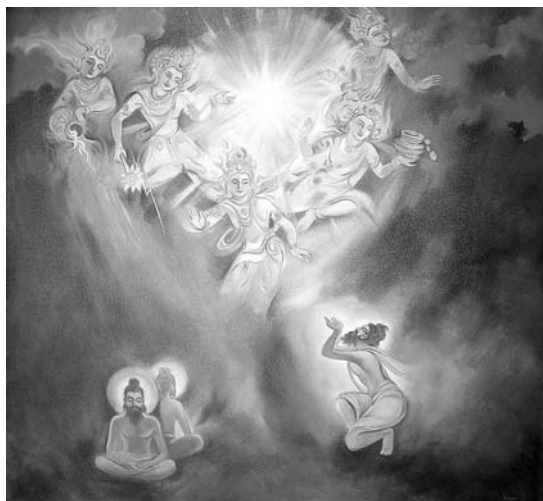
Mahatma Gandhi writes, 'Knowledge comes spontaneously to a *bhakta*. He does not have to wade through big volumes. But he who believes that he will acquire knowledge first and cultivate *bhakti* afterwards will fail miserably in his aim. No one can acquire knowledge in that way. Such knowledge breeds, if anything, pride. But he who lovingly cultivates devotion for the Lord and constantly thinks of Him gets knowledge without any special effort to that end.'²¹ Mahatma Gandhi did not just say this; he also followed it. That is why his ideas were so simple and effective, confounding traditional thinkers. Consider, for example, his idea of the salt march. Who would have thought that 'a pinch of salt' could mobilize millions of people?

Knowledge in the usual sense of the term is endless, for there are countless things to know. Therefore, mere accumulation of facts is a fruitless exercise. According to Sri Ramakrishna, even the great sages are like big ants. From a pile of sugar, when most can take barely one grain, they get perhaps eight or ten grains. But the huge pile is more or less intact. Just imagine, if great sages are big ants, then where are we? By our own ability, we can hardly know anything.

Sri Ramakrishna tells the story of the mango orchard. Some are 'leaf counters' while others enjoy the mangos. This is not to decry the pursuit of knowledge. Rather it is to focus our attention on the purpose of such a pursuit. It is not the amount of knowledge that is important, but the depth of understanding. It is therefore better to understand well a few things than to go on learning superficially many things.

Spiritual Discipline Reveals the Light of Spirit

One can become aware of the light of the Spirit through spiritual disciplines. One must light the lamp of knowledge in one's heart.



VIVEKANANDA ILIAM, CHENNAI

How? By the practice of prayer, contemplation, study, and unselfish action. Be silent and watchful. Be alert and still. Then deeper secrets are revealed. There is a time to think, to reason, to analyse. One must follow this with silent meditation.

The unchanging inner light is easy to meditate on and easy to focus the mind on. In his vesper hymn to Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda says, '*Jyotira jyoti ujala-hridi-kandara, tumi tamo-bhanjana har*; Light of all lights, shining in the heart, you destroyer of darkness (please destroy the darkness of our hearts).' This kind of prayer is answered. As Christ said, 'Ask, and it shall be given to you. Knock, and it shall be opened. Seek, and ye shall find.'²² He also said that if you ask God for bread, he will not give you stone. And Sri Ramakrishna says that if you take one step towards God, then God takes ten steps towards you. Swami Vivekananda adds, 'Light comes gently, slowly, but surely it comes.' He also says emphatically, 'Light must come.'²³

This is not something that happens in a day. One should not be discouraged or lose faith. Sri Ramakrishna says that one cannot see stars in the sky during the daytime, and yet they are there. Astronomers say that in the year 1250, a supernova explosion took place in a galaxy not very far from us. They came to this conclusion by analys-

ing light energy that is measurable today. A supernova burst is a catastrophic event, and since this galaxy is not far from us (in astronomical terms), it should have been an extraordinarily bright phenomenon, and yet the astronomical records of that era do not speak of it. Astronomers have suggested that perhaps this supernova was invisible, in the sense that its radiation was mainly in the form of X-rays. This illustrates how a major event can take place just in front of us but remain unperceived: because we don't have the eyes to see, we will not see. We have to be capable of registering that light. We have to be tuned to that light. At this very spot, all radio channels are available. But we need the right instrument—namely, a radio—and to tune it correctly, in order to hear them.

We noted earlier that we tend to seek guidance. Who will guide us? First, we should consult the teachings of illumined souls. Second, we should contemplate their words, look within, and discover the light for ourselves. We must retreat within to discover the underlying unity. We cannot do that without contemplation. Contemplation is the backbone of our spiritual life.

For contemplation, we need not go to any special place. Sri Ramakrishna said '*mone, bone, kone*'—it can be done in the mind, in the forest, or in the corner of a room. It is not where we are, but where our mind is that is important. Sri Ramakrishna likens contemplation to the making of butter. First, one has to boil milk and let it sit undisturbed so that it can set into curd. Then one churns the curd and extracts the butter. If the milk were poured into water, the two would mix and we would not be able to extract one from the other. But if the butter is set in water, it will float. Contemplation makes us integrated and whole so that the disintegrating influences of the world do not blow us around like leaves in a gale.

What do we discover when we contemplate? We discover that there is an inner light, the light of Being, which has been guiding us, and which is guiding us even now. In the

Bhagavadgita, Sri Krishna gives the following assurance: '*Tesām-evānukampāṁrtham-aham-ajñānajaṁ tamaḥ, nāśayāmy-ātmabhāvastho jñānadīpena bhāsvatā*'; For those who are struggling and who are attracted to the goal, I destroy the darkness born of ignorance with the shining lamp of wisdom.'²⁴

How and when the inner light is revealed is a mystery. Sri Ramakrishna says, 'Suppose a man is in a dark room. He goes on rubbing a match against a match-box and all of a sudden light comes. Likewise, if God gives us this flash of divine light, all our doubts are destroyed.' He also said, 'When light enters a room that has been kept dark a thousand years, does it remove the thousand years' darkness little by little, or instantly? Of course, at the mere touch of light all the darkness disappears.'²⁵

Spiritual disciplines become fruitful when they are undertaken with interest and attention. First, we must want the light. Second, we must direct our mind towards the light. This is what Christ meant when he said 'Ask and it shall be given ...' Notice that we need both interest and attention. Interest alone is not sufficient. In the *Kena Upanishad*, a student who is interested rises and asks the teacher 'Sir, please teach us the Upanishad'. But he did this *after* the sage had gone through an extensive discourse. This could mean that the student was not listening. He was interested but not paying attention. Similarly, it is not sufficient to pay attention but to have no interest. Many students try to memorize information so that they can satisfy the formal requirements of a programme. However, as they have not cultivated a real interest in the subject, their understanding is not deep, and they tend to forget the material once the pressure to remember it is removed. We need both interest and attention. Interest brings us to the water, and attention helps us to drink from it; the two together help us to be refreshed by it. It is said that lamps have to be kept clean and ready. Otherwise, even though the wick is good, there is plenty of oil, and the lamp is lit, the light will not come through. In us, the

light of spirit is always lit. By directing our interest and attention to it, we will discover it and make it possible for the light to come through.

This process of discovery is usually gradual, though it may be sudden. We are all struggling to discover that light. We make mistakes: it doesn't take an Einstein or a Plato to tell us our mistakes. But interest and attention to the spiritual goal keep us going. Moreover, every effort that we make in this direction brings the goal closer to us.

Lead, Kindly Light

John Henry Newman was a Christian minister in nineteenth-century England. During the summer of 1833, when he was thirty-two years old, he was travelling on a ship in the Mediterranean Sea. For one week, this ship was stranded between Corsica and Sardinia, unable to move because of dense fog. There, pondering his past and his future, he penned the following hymn:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home—
Lead thou me on!
Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene—one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now,
Lead thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

This hymn represents the spiritual struggle. We start with enthusiasm. But the way is long. It challenges some of our cherished views and assumptions. It challenges the way we live. Many get disappointed; many become frustrated and give up. Mahatma Gandhi sets a good example

of how not to give up. This hymn was a favourite of his. He was not born a saint or a mahatma. He did not seem to have any special gifts; but he had a love for truth. Through that love, he was able to struggle and lift himself to the extent that, even though he was engaged in one of the most important political and social struggles of the millennium, he considered himself a devotee, and others considered him a saint.

We *will* get light: but *when* we will get it is a mystery. We do not know. While waiting, perhaps our enthusiasm dims; we may even grow sceptical. We may also have a kind of conceit that we don't need any spiritual guidance. We may think that we are very rational people, very qualified in terms of our physical and intellectual abilities. But consider the process of life. We are born as children, helpless and dependent on others even to keep us alive. In youth, we rebel and try to assert our independence. But in old age, once again we are helpless and dependent on others. If we think over this whole process, we should become humble in the true sense of the word. This is not a kind of humility that makes us think we are incapable. Rather, this humility gives us faith in ourselves but also makes us prayerful and contemplative. And then we pray, 'Lead, kindly light'. I am ready to follow.

All of us need guidance and light. Ultimately, we need to discover that we are of the same nature as the Light that we seek guidance from. That all of us make that blessed discovery is my heartfelt prayer, now and always. *

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Dancing Shiva and the Self-creating World

DR BEATRICE BRUTEAU

(Continued from the previous issue)

Let us now shift to Bhakti Yoga. What does the heart make of what the mind has seen? It feels great relief, safety, freedom, and answering delight. Peace, confidence, at-home-ness, happiness. And since the 'voice' is addressing all of us, the feelings of peace, safety, and love extend to all those others. The heart 'feels' to its very bottom that it is loved by God and therefore it also loves God in return. Furthermore, it feels sufficiently safe to love all that God loves in order to be emotionally/intentionally united with the God of Love. It perceives 'heartwise' that God is essentially creative and generous, and it feels itself promised the power to be the same, to have and to exercise this same nature. *It believes in itself as the child of God*, and feels sureness and joy. And it understands heartwise that the more we create and share, the more we are like God, which is the same as being ourselves, our true selves.

We may say that the first conclusion to be drawn from the idea that we are all 'beloved children of God' is that we are all equal. As persons we are social equals. And this in itself requires a great shift in social consciousness, because most societies of living beings (not just humans) have some form of social ranking, with leadership and privileges. If we are to accept this word that we are all essentially 'offspring' of the Absolute Ground, then bhakti yoga will urge that we have feelings of honour, respect, and love toward one another. We will be motivated to see the Divine Image in everyone. The same self that is in me is in everyone else, and the same acceptance and respect that I want and expect, I must accord every other.

And this can be done if the bhakti aspect of my consciousness has sufficiently felt the secu-

rity of this insight. I will have no felt need to see myself as either superior or inferior to any other. Indeed, if I have deeply experienced being 'beloved', I will be relieved of the necessity of protecting and advancing my social status and thus I will have free energy (shakti) with which to love my companions. And knowing my own deep reality, I will recognize any other person as a 'companion'. I will feel kin to their inner selves and want them to experience and express the Divine Reality in the way that is right for them.

The second conclusion—a sort of corollary to the first—is that in any society or community that lives in these terms there will be no difference behaviours, no asymmetrical marks of respect, not in naming, conversation behaviours, gestures, privileges, or any other way of showing social ranking. Each person is to be accorded the highest respect, so there is no room for giving some 'more than' others.

These strong feelings of positive regard for all others will then translate into Karma Yoga, and the karma yoga effort will take account of secular concerns and include economics and politics. Social justice, social welfare, freedom and opportunity for all people will become part of our spiritual practice.

The Fig Tree and the Shared Supper

In the Hebrew tradition people realized that the real and truthful attitude to take toward the ground of their Being was that they ought to love God with 'all their heart and all their soul and all their *m'hodecha*'. This last is a broad word, usually translated 'might', or 'strength', or 'resources'. Perhaps it means something like 'everything you've got'. When

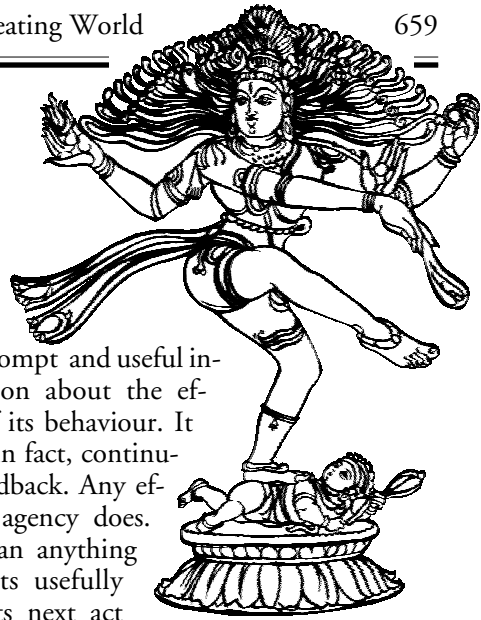
Jesus pointed out that there is a second natural commandment that is 'like unto' this first, 'Love your neighbour as yourself', perhaps his insight was that we ought to love our neighbours/companions/all other people with 'all our heart, soul, and *m'hodecha*'. What might this look like as an actual social program?

It has to come out of the basic view that we are the expression of God and that God is essentially creative and generous. So we are to be creative and generous. In fact, we have to be creative before we can be generous. We have to make something before we can share it or give it away. So our first question is how to encourage ourselves to be creative.

In the Hebrew tradition the ideal social order is called 'the Messianic Age'. When the evolution of consciousness reaches a certain point in the expressive gestures of the Dancer, when the critical-shift time has come, when the phase transition begins, then descriptions of this ideal era crop up. It is to be a time of peace and prosperity, when men 'beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks', when nations shall be united in the ways of God, and 'they shall sit every one under that one's own vine and own fig tree, and none shall make them afraid' (Micah, 4.3–4; 1 Kings, 4.25).

Do we have here a clue to the shape the next step in the 'divine dance' might take? What does it mean to be safe under your own fig tree? My suggestion is that this is a model for a sharing and cooperating community and that it rests on a foundation of—of all things!—*private property*.⁷ It sounds so contradictory. But there is a reason for it, and it lies in the nature of consciousness.

I proposed that minimal consciousness is responsiveness to the environment, the significant environment for the responding entity. So consciousness is a kind of conversation, an ongoing sharing of information, between the entity and its environment. The point is that for that entity to act and react in a way meaningful to itself and to its environment, it must have



very prompt and useful information about the effects of its behaviour. It needs, in fact, continuous feedback. Any effective agency does. How can anything that acts usefully place its next act until it gets some feedback on the effect of its previous action?

And here we can take account of the form this feedback takes and its relation to the subjective experience of the agent, the one acting. The feedback has to include specific data about the state of affairs as a result of the previous act, but besides that its report must necessarily include a kind of 'judgment' on the agent's behaviour. The agent begins to experience what we will later—when we're talking about more complex beings than protons—call 'pleasure' and 'pain'—a subjective experience of whether the act was successful, good for, the agent. This is a kind of shorthand for 'do it again' or 'don't': efficient guidance for the agent. (Note the utility of pain in passing, but I won't discuss that.)

It's the 'privacy' of this feedback that I want to consider. The feedback, both as objective data and as subjective judgment, has to come back to the agent in a tight loop if that agent is to be able to perform continuously and effectively and creatively—getting better at whatever it is doing. The agent has to be able to 'control' its behaviour. Even the lowly proton will move toward or away from another particle on the basis of new information about the nature of the relation between them. It needs to be in control of the way it produces its behaviour. So

it needs to receive the feedback/judgment on its behaviour. In our economy this is called an 'incentive' and is usually interpreted as a reward for successful action. The incentive-reward-feedback needs to come back to the same agent who placed the act to which the reward/feedback is the response. This is not necessarily a greediness motive. It's an information necessity for successful action.

Therefore I propose to define 'private property' this way: 'Creative control over the means of production of whatever the agent produces.' The control that is needed is control over the creation of the next action. In complex situations of numerous alternatives it means freedom, right, and ability to choose the action. The action that produces something uses some means, so the agent needs to have control over that means, whatever it is. For a musician, for instance, it could be time and place to practise. This creative control is the real issue in 'ownership'. The reason you want to have your 'own' means of production is so that you can readily control the production. When the agent has this creative control of the means of production and receives promptly the feedback—in data and 'reward'—then the agent is able to perform properly. When these conditions are missing or impaired, when the worker cannot control the means of production and does not receive directly the reward that fluctuates with the quality of the product, then the productivity itself suffers. It sounds strange to say it, but the argument seems to lead to the conclusion that the image of God in the finite agent is inhibited if these conditions are lacking. So that's why it's important to have your own fig tree. It enables you to be properly 'creative' like God.

Successful productivity almost always builds up a *surplus*. In the case of agriculture, for instance, for every germinating seed you plant,

you get back maybe a hundred. So you have more than you can consume, you have some to share. Thus we come to the metaphor of the 'shared supper' and the building of community bonds. The various producers come together, each bringing their own surplus of whatever kinds of 'figs' they've produced, and they exchange these goods by some suitable method. The exchanging creates community bonds of interdependence and of friendship when the sharing is done, as we are hypothesizing here, with deep respect and care for the other party.

When the exchanging/sharing economic community becomes large, it will need, for its convenience and ability to operate the exchange successfully, some organized method and agreed upon rules. And thus we come to laws and political organization. And here again the basic insight into the reality of finite beings as children of God, as dance gestures of the Infinite deserving of incomparable respect, will govern the way the laws are drawn and practised. Legal protection of this 'private property', including the right to sell it, is a first move; then regulations on how the exchanging is to be handled fairly.

At this point, we note the possibility of a problem: Because of the nature of surplus, which is the foundation of sharing, we also have the appearance of *positive feedback* leading to accumulation. If Nature returns you a hundredfold on your effort, then in the next round you can 'plant' a hundred instead of one, and reap enormously. The more you have, the further you can gain. That's called 'positive feedback', making you do the same thing again. So now you really have extra, more than enough for exchanging. And at this point you can image the divine Ground by being generous as well as creative. Both creative and generous, as the Ground itself is. There will likely be some

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agents who for one reason or another have not been able to work or have not been successful. The God-imagining community corrects this by generously giving these persons what they need—what they need to live, what they need to be as creative as they can be in their circumstances.

Won't some people take advantage of this and pretend to be in need when they could be working? Under the hypothesis that the whole community has realized its status as 'children of God', together with the derivative conclusions, no, no one will do that. No one would have any reason to want to do that. Freed from insecurity about meaningfulness and love, every person naturally wants to be creative. It's built into one's nature: children of the Creator want above all to be creative. They even want to be generous, that's natural too. 'Beating the system' by deceit and trickery is a way to be creative for people deprived of the satisfaction of being creative in other ways. But if they are not so deprived, they will not prefer that way to ways that are more personally satisfying and allow larger scope for creative action.

But if the community is still in transition—a much more likely hypothesis—then those who have realized more freedom will help those who haven't by showing respect and positive regard, by offering education and training and opportunity, supported by legal protections and rewards. And the political arrangements of a community well enough along in the transition will provide for this. It is difficult sometimes for people to believe that they are loved, let alone that they are 'children of God'. So a lot of patience in trying to bring about this phase transition is required. And also a lot of experimentation to find good ways of advancing the transition. It can be expected to take a long while. We have been up and down, back and forth, with these ideals for a few millennia already. But the ideals persist, and we have made a bit of progress. We have some vision of what our great community could possibly be. And that fact alone is ground for strong hope.

The New Wholeness: What Shall We Be?

In the shared supper we are practising neighbour-love, involving the heart, the soul, and all our *m'hodecha*. Recalling that each time the entities of a given level share their characteristic energies they form a new, next-higher, whole, we will certainly ask whether the same pattern applies to us. If human beings interact in terms of positive-regard feelings and intellectual understanding of our natural unity, and if we actually share our various kinds of wealth, will we begin to constitute a new-level whole? The discussion so far implies that we will. It would seem from past cosmic experience, that it is the Creator's intention to persevere with the method of achieving new kinds of beings by uniting the beings of the previous level of organization. But we also know that one of the marks of this type of creation is that you cannot predict what the union of existing wholes will be.

We are in the position of Second Isaiah's community when the prophet announces to them that prediction was to some degree possible in the past—God told the people what would happen before it happened. But now God is taking a new tack: 'From this time forward I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known. They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them, so that you could say, "I already knew them." You have never heard, you have never known, from of old your ear has not been opened' (Isaiah, 48.6–8). All we know is the creative union which enormously increases the types of activities and the consciousness of the new whole. But each time there is a huge surprise. And this time the elements to be united are already self-conscious and already novelty-producers, themselves. And since each time the surprise gets much bigger, how can we keep from wondering?

Novelty: It is a fascinating thing to reflect on. Why is our world so full of novelty? One new thing after another, ever since the planet first gave birth to life, indeed ever since the 'cosmic fluctuation of the Void'. We may say it is

the expression in finite terms of the infinitude of the Ground. The Ground is not limited. It has no particularities, no description. Is unlimited production of new descriptive beings a way to express the unlimited reality of the Ground? And we, the offspring of the 'unlimited novelty producer', can also produce endless novelties. It is the true source of our wealth, of our *m'ho-decha*, the proof of the abundance of the world and the falseness of our belief in scarcity,⁸ foundation of our fears and our hurtful behaviours.

Whatever is new truly comes 'out of nothing'. To be new means not to have been before. The new thing is embodied in previously existing materials, of course, but the *newness* of it is in no way 'previous'. There was no such thing as a living cell before those cooperating and sharing molecules formed it. When the new thing first appears, it is unique. Then its level of organization gradually spreads. Eventually that level is extant everywhere in its appropriate environments. Then another new thing arises and the process starts over again. The spreading of the new kind of thing acts as an energy-driver. It re-organizes the previously existing entities, gives them a new form. The act of organizing is anti-entropic. The local 'system' into which this newness is injected is not 'closed'.

The material things organized will come apart again and scatter into disorganized randomness, entropy. But as long as creativity is still expressing, these scattered beings can be re-organized. Creativity is like fresh energy being injected into the universe—like the original injection of energy from the fluctuation of the Void. Where does the *newness* come from? Could it be coming from *consciousness*? And if consciousness is truly an independent primitive as the real-

ity-dimension of *relation*, then may we question whether the universe as a whole is a 'closed system'? The physical energy of any universe may be set by the measure of the original fluctuation, but perhaps the consciousness dimension is independent of that and can continue to inject newness into the world—at least as long as the physical energies have not reached their maximal entropy state.

In any case, we, as conscious creators of novelty now, can apply ourselves to enlivening the relation-bonds among us. The planet is now unified in terms of communication and the sharing of goods and information as it has never been before. The Internet enables conversation with most parts of

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the world, and the global market is interchanging all sorts of products. Although terrible dominations are still being practised, some of them now by means of the globalization itself, an infrastructure for human unity is nevertheless gradually growing. We are closer to acknowledging and respecting those of different ethnic origin and different language and customs than we used to be. We actually have institutions for promoting respectful interactions, such as the United Nations and any number of international aid programs founded on recognition of our common humanity and our obligation to succour human need wherever it is found. When we apply ourselves to undermining the economic, political, and personal causes of human suffering—as distinguished from treating some of the wounds after the injuries—we will take the most important step towards the new era. Understanding how far down into the human psyche those causes go and just what their roots are is part of the work of bringing about this critical shift in conscious-



ness that leads us into the next phase of the Self-creating world.

To know ourselves as Shiva's gestures, as expressive words of the divine Ground, as beloved children of God who inherit the powers of creativity and generosity, is the fundamental step, without which we will only continue to abuse one another in our fear-filled struggle to secure ourselves. But just as fast as we come to understand and appreciate this basic reality, we can begin to practise the mutual respect and mutual support that it implies.

The felt sense of the personal presence of other people all over the world, a growing ability to be aware of the interpersonal energy-bonds that connect us into a gigantic organism of differentiated and shared functions within the new level unity—this begins to characterize our mentality, our imagination, our feelings, our intentionality, our will. We begin to sense the others in a way that makes *togetherness* a new reality. Symbiosis, the life-sharing integration that makes the new thing, is at work among us. We are separately aware of ourselves but we are also beginning to be aware of ourselves as the Whole. My neighbour is a symbiotic member of this great Self. Thus my neighbour's life is precious to me as being my own life.

If we are individually gestures of Shiva's dance, we are, all together, Shiva's dancing body. Can we each feel the wholeness of the whole body? And simultaneously know that it is the body of the Absolute? This is the turn in the development of the self-creating world from the era of the outgoing, and severalizing, to the era of the ingoing, of re-integration. But all this is a cycle, and is one Being. All of this is always present, always real. *

References

7. For a detailed explanation, with examples, of why legally protected private property is essential to prosperity of families, democratic government, and care of the planet, see Tom Bethell, *The Noblest Triumph: Property and Prosperity Through the Ages* (New York: St Martin's, 1998).
8. For an argument that the current economics of scarcity is mistaken and should be replaced by an economics of abundance, based on the human talent for creating novelty, and how technological inventions breed further inventions, increasing wealth with each generation, and how one of the best ways to create wealth and success is by giving away a new method or process so that it spreads rapidly and sparks new uses for itself, see Paul Zane Pilzer, *God Wants You to Be Rich* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995). Consult index under 'scarcity' and 'technology'. This economic view opposes the idea that some become rich at the expense of others. It doesn't have to be a zero-sum. Because of human talent all can prosper.

यस्योन्मेषनिमेषाभ्यां जगतः प्रलयोदयौ । तं शक्तिचक्रविभवप्रभवं शंकरं स्तुमः ॥

यत्र स्थितमिदं सर्वं कार्यं यस्माच्च निर्गतम् । तस्यानावृतरूपत्वान्न निरोधोऽस्ति कुत्रचित् ॥

We sing the glory of Shankara, by the mere opening and closing of whose eyelids is accomplished the appearance and dissolution of the world, and who is the source of the glorious web of Power (Shakti).

He in whom this world rests, and from whom it has come forth, is disaffirmed nowhere, for His essence can never be concealed.

—Spanda Karika, 1, 2

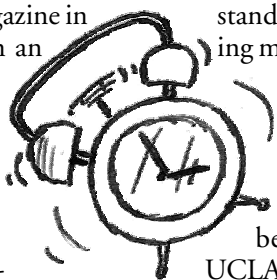
Perchance to Dream: Sleep and Spiritual Life

HIRANYAGARBHA

I was leafing through an old magazine in the library the other day when an article called ‘Dreams and Deep Sleep’¹ almost woke me from my reverie. The author was outlining the stages of sleep. In deep sleep, which occurs mainly in the first three or four hours, the body recovers from physical fatigue. There are also other stages of sleep, including REM (rapid eye movement, indicative of dreams) sleep, which we need in order to recover from mental fatigue and stress. How much stress we accrue while awake determines how much we need to dream. Theoretically, no stress means no need to recover and thus an exemption from dreaming, and no need for any sleep beyond the first few hours. Meditation and other spiritual practices might mitigate the need for dreams by dismantling the conditions for stress. Ramakrishna, who loved the song about ‘putting sleep to sleep’, seems to have been a living proof of this theory. Likewise, his disciple, Swami Brahmananda, called sleeping more than five hours ‘a disease’. A learned article on an intriguing subject, but that’s not why it caught my eye.

I Can’t Pay the Rent

When I was in college, I didn’t know how to pay my rent one month. The month before, I had sold the new guitar my dad had given me. Two months before, I had been waterproofing the inner hull of a pleasure boat in the marina, advancing on all fours through an airless crawl-space that would have made a rat back out, pushing in front of me a pail of varnish and a lantern that gave off an evil hiss every time a drop of the noxious stuff dropped on it. I couldn’t see the owner, but I could hear him



standing on the dock, cheering me on, urging me deeper into the bowels of his boat. I didn’t know whom to speak to about selling my soul—I had run out of ideas.

In the nick of time, a family friend mentioned a research study being conducted across campus at UCLA’s Neuropsychiatric Institute. Would I like to be paid as an experimental subject?

‘What would I have to do?’ I asked.

‘Sleep’, she said.

You Must Pay the Rent

At nineteen, you don’t say no to a job that’s perfectly aligned with your skills and that you don’t have to remain conscious for. Twenty-four hours later five subjects met three scientists and various technicians and attendants in a lab. Without preliminaries, we were each hooked up to our own tangle of electrodes whose cables went madly off in all directions before disappearing into a blinking bank of equipment. Each of us got a pill to swallow. Then the lights were snapped out and we lay there, wires branching out of us, machines pulsing dimly in the background. We all had different histories, different hopes and different dreams, but we all hoped that sleep would come.

Eight hours later our dreams were interrupted not by our mothers reminding us to go to school, but by a couple of underpaid lab attendants yanking electrodes from our faces. We were herded into an improvised canteen for orange juice and doughnuts (to boost our blood sugar, not silence our hunger) and then given columns of figures to add for half an hour. Then we were free to go.

We were told nothing about the study. I thought it might have something to do with the

effect of fried dough on computational skills, which was positive. But I didn't care about the science part; my waking hours were my own and the rent was going to be paid.

The Second Day

That night our little crew gathered again, same time, same place. There was plenty of camaraderie. After all, we were being paid to sleep—a dream job. But on the second morning, one of us was in a dark mood.

'I know what you're doing', Frank announced at breakfast. We asked him what he meant.

'For example, you took some of my orange juice just now, when I was opening the window.' No one had actually seen him open a window, but Rob—glancing around—offered Frank some of his own juice, and we all thought that would be the end of it. That night, Frank wouldn't speak to any of us.

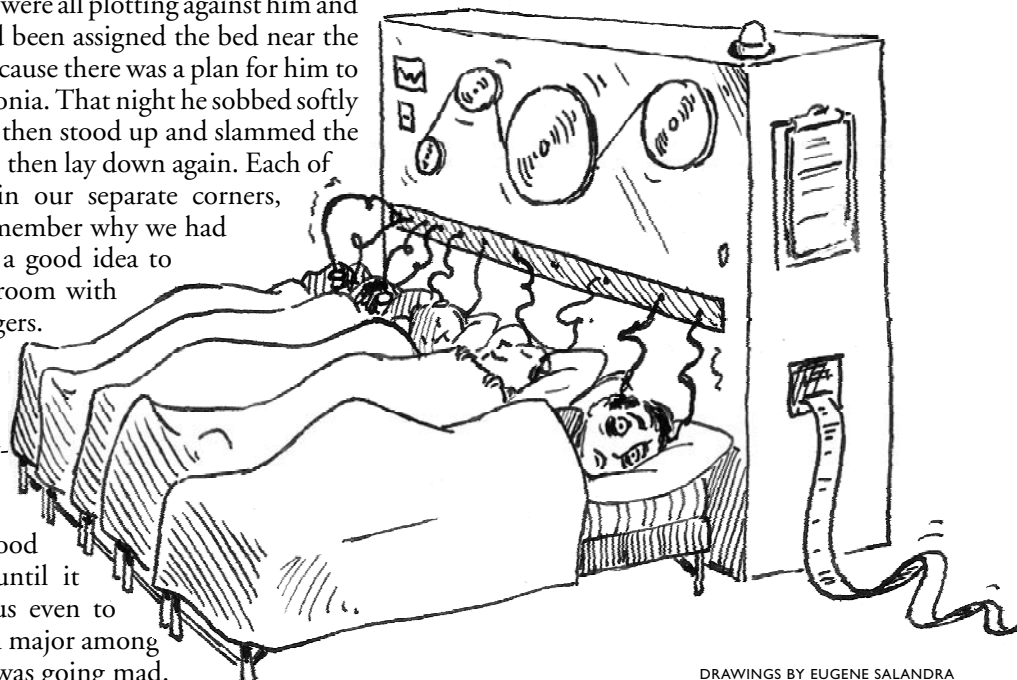
The next morning and evening went by without incident. On the third day Frank started cursing before getting out of bed, insisting that we were all plotting against him and that he had been assigned the bed near the window because there was a plan for him to get pneumonia. That night he sobbed softly for awhile, then stood up and slammed the door twice, then lay down again. Each of us, alone in our separate corners, tried to remember why we had thought it a good idea to sleep in a room with four strangers. Gradually, over the course of the twenty-seven-day study, Frank's mood darkened until it was obvious even to the English major among us that he was going mad.

Sleepers, Awake

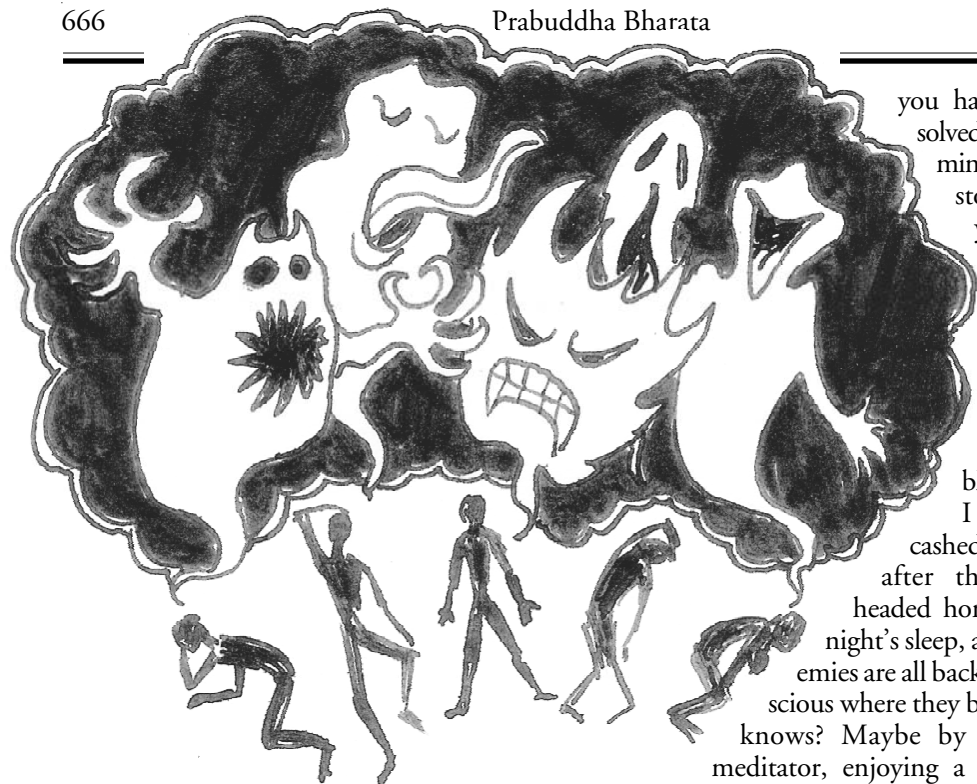
We found out later that the study was for NASA, who wanted to know the effects of certain sleeping pills they were formulating for astronauts. Unbeknownst to us, the team of investigators monitoring our brainwaves and arithmetic had been systematically waking Frank up every couple of hours, as soon as he entered REM sleep. Then he would go back to sleep, never realizing that he had woken up, but never having a dream either. Other nights, they would not have to wake him up because the pills were having the same effect, keeping him from entering the REM stage of sleep. Why were they doing all this? They were investigating the risks associated with deprivation of REM sleep and the absence of dreams. Frank wasn't told what was happening, but by the end of the study he had to be restrained at the sight of the researchers, who he was sure were controlling his thoughts and sabotaging his life.

I Can Dream, Can't I?

It was a graphic demonstration: If you



DRAWINGS BY EUGENE SALANDRA



think you can put sleep to sleep without practising meditation or otherwise finding a way of dealing with the inner tensions with which you've polluted your waking consciousness, you're dreaming. You will dream anyway, but you'll do it while walking around in the world instead of safely under the covers.

It raises some disturbing side questions. How much of our accusations and troubles are only a little more reasonable than Frank's? If

you had fewer unresolved issues in your mind, would Frank stop reminding you of yourself?

It's easy to see squabbling over orange juice as unreasonable. But what about our own squabbles?

I hope Frank cashed his paycheck after the study and headed home for a good night's sleep, and that his enemies are all back in his subconscious where they belong. Or who knows? Maybe by now he is a meditator, enjoying a dose of hard-won, wide-awake, stress-free, super-rational joy.

When the study was published, I found out that because I was the youngest of the group I had been given only placebos and dreamed quite a lot, so my own irrationality remains under investigation. *

Reference

- 1 Swami Satyaswarupananda, 'Dreams and Deep Sleep – II', *Vedanta Kesari* 91/7 (July 2004), 258–265.

Would You Like to Contribute?



Does this story ring a bell? You too would have had interesting life-experiences that you might like to share with our readers: anecdotes that are instructive, insightful, or just plain funny. Or you may have a knack for seeing the lighter side of things, or a flair for art that provokes thinking or tickles the funny bone. If so, then send us your writing or artwork for possible publication. You too may strike a sympathetic cord!

Thrown Out by Allah

A MONK

Caught up in a jam, the old car was slowly inching its way through the busy bazaar which crowded the pavements and encroached upon the narrow and winding lane. Sitting on a rear seat, I looked lazily at the bustling crowd dominated by men with long beards in sherwanis and embroidered caps. One could see the minarets of the local mosque where the muezzin was preparing to call for the *namaz-e-maghrib*. The entire scene appeared as familiar to me as it was thirty years back when I used to roam these streets before I moved out—only the crowd had increased considerably.

Musing over the events that had occurred many years ago on these very streets, I was reminded of the blind Muslim fakir who used to sit outside the cotton store near the mosque. He was reputed to have special spiritual powers, and several of us young friends had once gone to him to see the matter for ourselves. He was in his early middle age then, and we had found him squatting by the roadside under the eaves of the local cotton store. He had a black coat on and a begging bowl in front of him. He was constantly swaying back and forth, and would occasionally murmur to himself, but refused to be drawn into conversation, however much we tried.

He obviously disliked inquisitive crowds intruding into his privacy. So I decided to visit him alone another day. That day, he was in a more forthcoming mood, and we soon built up a rapport. He was born blind, he said in reply to my query. As soon as he was old enough, his father—who used to eke out a living by stitching used gunny bags—decided to have him beg to augment the family income. Every day he would bring him over to this place outside the cotton shop and leave him there till evening, when he would again take him back home.

‘One day,’ the fakir continued, ‘my father just didn’t come to take me back, and I have been here ever since.’

Did he never try to find a better shelter, I inquired. ‘Yes, I did,’ he replied. ‘Some people asked me why I didn’t move over to the nearby mosque at night and sleep in the courtyard there as many other poor people did. Hearing their advice, I crawled up to the mosque one night and found my way in. Unfortunately, someone picked me up with his hands and threw me out of the mosque. The throw was so violent that I landed in the nearby cemetery, badly bruised. After recovering from the shock of the fall, I managed to summon some courage and crawled back to the mosque, only to meet with the same fate again. This time I was quite badly hurt, and I cried out in pain, “I don’t know who you are, but you are obviously a powerful person. But I have never harmed anyone. I survive on whatever alms I get, and I pray to Allah; why then should you ill-treat me like this?” A voice replied, “Why do you come to my mosque with an impure mind? Purify yourself first, and then come to sleep in my mosque.” “Are you then Allah? How else could you know about the state of my mind? You obviously have the power to see into my mind. Then why do you not remove the dirt from my mind and purify me? But please do not make me suffer like this.” “Alright,” the voice replied, “Every day, after you have finished begging, take a bath, come to the mosque, say your namaz, and then go to sleep.” I have followed these instructions ever since.’

The disarming simplicity of his narrative and the uncommon charm that he exuded attracted me profoundly, and I used to visit him off and on till I left home and became a monk.

Now I felt a deep desire to go and see if the

fakir was still alive. I was bound to draw people's attention, being in ochre robes, but I could not resist. I asked the car to stop, stepped out, and walked to the mosque. Sure enough, the fakir was there in the very place I had seen him thirty years ago, in his black coat, swaying back and forth. His grey hair was the sole evidence of the passage of all these intervening years.

'Hello! How are you?' I asked, as I stood in front of him. 'Savyasachin, you!' the fakir responded without a moment's hesitation,

'Where have you been all these days? I thought you had found a job and had moved out somewhere.'

I then described the events of my life since I last met him, telling him about my monastic life. 'That was bound to happen; to happen for sure,' he nodded. 'That's very good.'

We talked for some time, and then I took leave. 'Keep well,' I said. 'You keep well too,' he replied, and fell back into his reverie. *



Ravana abducting Sita : A Rajamahendri Ramayana painting



Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

Swami Ramakrishnananda: A Portrait in Pictures. Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 005. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com. 2006. viii + 120 pp. Rs 125.

The thunderous cataracts of bhakti, jnana, karma, and yoga, commingling and getting harnessed to transform a parched spiritual landscape and spiritualize innumerable empty lives: this is the saga of Swami Ramakrishnananda. At the urgent request of his Madras disciples and admirers, Swami Vivekananda had promised: 'I shall send you one who is more orthodox than the most orthodox Brahmins of the South and who is at the same time incomparable in performing worship, scriptural knowledge, and meditation on God.' This was Swami Ramakrishnananda, Sri Ramakrishna's apostle to the South. Thus unfolded the second part of the great swami's divine life, a life moulded by his service to Sri Ramakrishna. And it enfolded scores of people who felt the living God in their midst, engaged in their welfare.

Swami Vivekananda had wanted the name Ramakrishnananda for himself, but having witnessed Sashi Bhushan Chakravarty's exemplary one-pointed devotion to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, he conferred this name on the latter during their ordination as monks. This in itself speaks volumes for Swami Ramakrishnananda's character and spiritual orientation.

This photo-biography of Swami Ramakrishnananda, published on his 144th birth anniversary, traces his life and works from humble but devout beginnings to the towering heights of spiritual realization, and chronicles his immense contribution to the Ramakrishna Order and to the country, especially South India. The book is full of rare photographs strung together by an engaging narrative. Sashi Maharaj, as he was popularly called, met and inspired many people and visited a great many places. In this book one gets a glimpse of a gigantic personality etching itself indelibly on the religious and spiritual history of India. A whole panorama of

people and places connected with him has been reproduced in this volume.

Printed on glossy art paper in demy quarto, this hard-bound volume is a valuable addition to the growing Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi-Vivekananda literature, and is bound to receive an enthusiastic reception.

Swami Satyamayananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

Rajamahendri Ramayana Paintings. *Sistla Srinivas*. Drusya Kala Deepika, 4-61-7, Lawson's Bay Colony, Visakhapatnam 530 017. E-mail: drusyakala@sify.com. 2005. xxviii + 200 pp. Rs 395.

This is a research work on Indian art, especially the Ramayana paintings of Rajamahendri, from Sistla Srinivas, an assistant professor in art history and aesthetics at Andhra University. The author has dug deeply into the subject and has brought out innumerable shining diamonds for us to view.

Painting is one of the major fine arts, at par with sculpture, dance, music, and literature. Sri Srinivas's upbringing imbued him with love for Indian culture as depicted in the classical works—Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavata—in Sanskrit and Telugu. His native village Manchalla in Guntur as well as the surrounding villages are famous for their temples, and this has obviously fuelled his interest further.

The paintings under discussion are the works of two painters: Nandigam Nagesam and Kamaroutu Venkatesam. Like Indian sculptors of yore, they did not sign their names to any of their paintings. But Kolapelli Buchenna, who wrote a Telugu commentary on each of the folios, gives their names, as also the date of his work: Thursday, 14 September 1758.

The paintings are in two sets: one on the six cantos of the Ramayana (33 paintings), and the other on holy sites or *kshetras* (53 paintings). A further 11 paintings by the same artists were sold

to anonymous buyers in London in 1972 and 1975. Information about these paintings was made available by Jagdish Mittal and Stella Kramrisch, and these have been briefly discussed in this book.

Buchenna's commentary is a simple descriptive prose in colloquial Telugu; this is precisely the style preferred by modern art critics like Srinivas himself, whose writing reveals a mastery of the Telugu idiom.

The book under review is in two parts. The first, with eight chapters, deals with the universality and contemporaneity of the Ramayana, the Sanskrit and Telugu versions of the epic (along with visual representations), works on Ramayana paintings in North and South India, and facts and observations about the Rajamahendri paintings. The study includes comparisons of the depictions of the Rajamahendri painters with the texts of the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Ranganatha Ramayana*, and *Molla Ramayana*. The Islamic (both Mughal and Deccan) and European influences are also analysed. The Rajamahendri school of painting and the commentary on the ideals depicted in the Rajamahendri paintings have been carefully dealt with.

The second half of the book deals with the paintings themselves. The Ramayana paintings start with the Putrakāmeṣṭi Yajna of King Dasharatha and conclude with the coronation of Sri Rama. Though the reproductions are not in colour, they are a feast to the eye and mind for their craftsmanship and artistic talent. Srinivas's descriptions are equally detailed. Consider this:

'After drawing seven circles around Sita, Laxmana left the place in search of Rama. Ravana came in disguise as a mendicant and asked Sita to give alms. When Sita brought alms, he revealed his true self to her which was similar to the personality of him shown in the chariot. He caught the terrified Sita by her hand, dragged her into the chariot and took her away to Lanka.

'At the bottom [of the painting] is Ravana in disguise as a mendicant, gripping Sita's hand. Behind them are the circles drawn by Laxmana. Close to these circles is a tree. On the top is Ravana in a chariot, with ten heads, twenty hands, and thirty-six weapons. Behind him, placing her finger on her chin in sadness, is Sita.'

The work is suitably named *Nayanābhirāma Anusīlana*, a study of the one that is pleasing to the eye. And a feast to the eye it indeed is. The author's talent shows in every page of this pleasing volume.

The readers may expect similar works from Sistla Srinivas in the future.

Sahitya Brahma Dr V V L Narasimha Rao
Hyderabad

Faith and Devotion in Theravāda Buddhism. *VVS Saibaba*. D K Printworld, 'Sri Kunj', F-52 Bali Nagar, New Delhi 110 015, E-mail: dkprintworld@vsnl.net. 2005. xxix + 231 pp. Rs 480.

This is a deeply researched and well-represented documentation of early Buddhism—Theravāda (Pali) or Sthaviravāda (Sanskrit)—and its views on God, its concept of faith, and its development towards devotion with the passage of time and advancement of Buddhist ideas.

By the time Buddhism started gaining ground, the Vedic tradition had already developed to a very high pitch, with lofty ideas, and concepts of Brahman, cosmic evolution, transmigration, and sacrifice. The six schools of Indian philosophy were the culmination of this theistic Vedic philosophy.

Buddhism originated and developed during the 6th century BCE against the backdrop of all these philosophical developments as a sort of protestant philosophical thought which got institutionalized during the very lifetime of the Buddha and went on consolidating itself during the following centuries.

The Buddha apparently adopted an atheistic attitude, denying the existence and role of an unseen Brahman, or Creator, or any such omnipresent and omnipotent entity dispensing justice according to the good or bad deeds of earthly beings. Instead, he emphasized morality and ethics, and felt more concerned with the miseries of life and the way out of them. The Buddha's stance on questions of metaphysics has not been fully and satisfactorily addressed in Buddhism. This makes Buddhism more ethical than metaphysical.

Buddhism accepted the deities of the Hindu pantheon, but with a difference. Brahman Sahampati—the Lord of *sahā* (the present world), Indra Maghavā, Varuṇa, Yama, Kubera, and the like have been referred to variously in the Pali Tripitaka and post-Tripitaka literature. There is a common tendency in religious texts to show one's own founder as the most respected, most powerful, most knowledgeable, and most compassionate, and deities of other faiths as much inferior or subject to the for-

mer. Buddhism too is not free from this tendency. Therein even Brahmā has been depicted as lacking omniscience and as being ignorant of his own potential. So far as Hinduism is concerned, Brahmā is believed to have taken birth out of the navel of Viṣṇu, but is accorded the highest place at par with Viṣṇu and Śiva as part of the Trinity.

Regarding the Buddha's place in the Hindu pantheon, it is a common belief that he is the ninth incarnation of Viṣṇu, who takes upon himself the governance of the universe and guards living beings from evil forces by being born in this world from time to time. Accordingly, when evil forces crept into the Vedic system itself, Viṣṇu incarnated himself as the Buddha and, taking recourse to atheism, criticized the Vedas and Vedic rituals, prescribing in their stead a simple and straightforward moral path of purification based on non-violence, love, and compassion, and leading to nirvana.

Faith is essential not only in religious and spiritual life but also in day-to-day worldly affairs. Buddha considered it the seed for spiritual farming and mental culture. He was perhaps the first historical personality who talked about 'rationality' in faith in place of 'blind faith' and advised his disciples to follow even his words only after analysing them through proper reasoning. Naturally, this appealed to both the common masses and the intelligentsia, and became one of the forceful reasons for Buddhism's great popularity and wide spread not only in different regions of India but even beyond its boundaries; this appeal continues unabated.

Buddhism talks of the 'law of dependent origination', a chain of twelve dependent processes—beginning with ignorance and ending with old age and death—that makes for samsara. But it does not provide a conclusive answer on the cause or origin of ignorance, whether it is dependent on old age and death or on something else.

Regarding the Buddha's status, Dr Saibaba mentions different types of supernatural powers attributed to him—human, demonic, as well as godly, which themselves make him a supernatural deity. Further, three kinds of *parinibbāna*, namely, *kilesa parinibbāna*, *khandha parinibbāna* and *dhātu parinibbāna*, make the Buddha immortal. It is worth noting that the Buddha did not get annihilated after his *parinibbāna* (187), and his spiritual presence in his relics made way for their veneration (188).

Saddhā, described as reasoned faith (*ākāravatī*) and as accompanied by understanding (*paññāmayī*),

plays a vital role in spiritual life. Citing various original Pali texts like *Suttanipāta*, *Dhammapada*, *Jātakas*, *Cullavāṇī*, *Puggalapaññatti*, and *Milindapañha*, the author has very beautifully sketched the gradual development of *saddhā* to *thavāna* (*stavana*) and *thoma* (*stoma*, a hymn of praise), which further deepened into *bhāttī* (*bhakti*).

Deepening of faith resulted in the generation of devotion, which was of importance in the development of Mahayana. Therein we find that the historical personality of the Buddha was gradually overshadowed by, and got assimilated into, his 'adored' personality, and this resulted in the enhancement of his image as a supernatural being. The concept of *trikāya* (*dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya* or *rūpakāya*) sounds much like Hindu metaphysics. His celestial body (*sambhogakāya*) enables his interaction with other deities and the *nirmāṇakāya* reminds one of the Hindu avatars. Thus Mahayana Buddhism got trapped in the same web of 'eternalism' against which Theravada Buddhism had started out as a revolt.

The author has presented the Theravada Buddhist perspectives on faith and devotion in a scholarly and yet lucid manner, and therefore deserves appreciation and *sādhuvāda*.

Dr Baidyanath Labh

Reader, Department of Buddhist Studies
University of Jammu, Jammu

Universal Values: As Reflected in Literature. Dr Santikumar Ghosh. Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. E-mail: rmic@vsnl.com. 2004. viii + 128 pp. Rs 50.

Universal Values is a condensation of lectures that were delivered by the author at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, over a period of eight years (1996-2004). Apart from being a professor of economics, the author is also a well-known Bengali poet and a connoisseur of ancient Indian literature. He has extracted universal values from the mass of Indian literature that he studied, and has condensed and rearranged the material in the present book for the convenience of those who are new to the subject.

The text has twelve chapters spread over ancient, medieval, and modern periods. The author has provided a bird's-eye view of the literature and religious

movements of these periods. But it is the modern period that he has dwelt upon in greater detail. He narrates the cause of the downfall of the Mughal empire and the rise of British power. There is also a chapter on the Ramakrishna Movement.

Dr Ghosh refers to the revival of Sanskrit studies in the late eighteenth century through the efforts of Western scholars and East India Company officials who appreciated the treasures in Sanskrit literature. He also dwells on the process of integration of India into a single entity and the grafting of Western ideas on the Indian mind through English literature and history. While this process modernized the Indian mind, the most important impact of Western culture, in the author's view, was the replacement of blind faith—characteristic of the medieval age—by a spirit of rationalism, which seeks to enquire and argue before accepting anything.

Three important chapters are devoted to Rabin-dranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, and Mahatma Gandhi, whom the author studies against the cultural background of the land. Each of these great men has passed on to us a legacy of universal values that is a source of nourishment for all.

The book, short as it is, is a capsule for universal cultural health and is targeted at the Indian youth. For this the author and the publisher deserve to be congratulated. The book deserves a place in all personal and public libraries.

Dr N B Patil

Honorary Director, Dr P V Kane Institute
for Postgraduate Research and Studies
Asiatic Society, Mumbai.

The Three Jewels of Vedanta. *Swami Harshananda.* Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore 560 019. E-mail: rkmbblr_publi@vsnl.net. 2004. iv + 40 pp. Rs 15.

This is a booklet on the lives and teachings of Sri Shankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, and Sri Madhvacharya—the founders of the monistic, qualified monistic, and dualistic schools of Vedanta. They appeared on the Indian scene at crucial junctures to set the national life-current on the high road to true spirituality. The sublime influence of their lives and teachings on the collective Indian psyche has been an unseen yet mighty bulwark against the moral and spiritual ravages caused by foreign inva-

sions during medieval times. That kept the flickering lamp of knowledge and spirituality burning against the backdrop of the political and social turmoil of the last millennium. The Indian socio-religious scenario today would have been different but for them and the myriads of saints their respective schools of thought produced all over India. 'Each is great in his own place.' In this valuable booklet, the learned author presents a brief picture of their inspiring lives, teachings, and works to help the reader learn about their priceless contributions towards the preservation of Vedic culture, and thus develop an equal reverence for all of them.

Swami Shuddhidananda

Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

Effective Life Management. *Swami Amartya-nanda.* Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ramakrishna Avenue, Patna 800 004. E-mail: rkmpatna@sancharnet.in. 2005. x + 88 pp. Rs 30.

Management is the current buzzword. And with the shift in focus from the management of capital assets to human resources, the market is flush with bestsellers on self-development and on managing interpersonal relations.

This small book, though in the same genre, takes the lives and teachings of Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda as guideposts for personal development. It provides practical hints on undertaking effective introspection to manage our thoughts and curb negative traits like anger and jealousy. The key elements of this process are summed up in the acronym SDM (*satsanga* or holy company, discipline, and meditation). Directed at the youth, this book provides good food for thought, introspection, and healthy living.

PB

Book Received

Sri Sri Ram Thakur. *Comp. and ed. Prof. Bidhu Bhushan Chakraborty.* Sri Sri Thakur Ramchandra Dev Association, Sri Sri Satyanarayan Mandir, Tigri, M B Road, New Delhi 110 062. 2005. 113 pp.

A brief survey of the life and teachings of Sri Ram Thakur (1860-1949), the Vaishnava saint of Bengal.

Reports

New Trustees of the Ramakrishna Order

Four monks of the Ramakrishna Order have been appointed as trustees of the Ramakrishna Math and members of the governing body of the Ramakrishna Mission. The new trustees are Swamis Bodhasaranandaji, Divyanandaji, Girishanandaji, and Suviranandaji, respective heads of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati; Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda; Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur; and Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar.

New Names

Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKMVERI), Deemed University, has been renamed **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University** (established under Section 3 of UGC Act, 1956), in accordance with a notification by the University Grants Commission.

Vivekananda Polyclinic, which is administered by the **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow**, has been renamed **Vivekananda Polyclinic and Institute of Medical Sciences**.

Durga Puja Celebrated

Durga Puja, the autumnal worship of the



Durga Homa at Belur Math

Divine Mother, was celebrated at thirty-four centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission from 29 September to 2 October. At **Belur Math**, puja was performed with great solemnity and joy. Ignoring the occasional showers, thousands of devotees attended the puja on all four days. Kumari Puja, the worship of the Divine Mother in a young girl, was performed on 30 September and drew huge crowds. Sandhi Puja, the special worship performed during the transition from the Ashtami to the Navami day, took place in the early morning of 1 October, and was also attended by many devotees. Kolkata Doordarshan broadcast parts of the puja live on all four days. In all, cooked prasad was served to about 79,000 devotees.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, observed the Durga Puja in a pandal near the ashrama's temple. Large crowds were drawn to the ashrama, especially during the Kumari Puja, when 25,000 devotees of all faiths gathered. About 20,000 devotees were served cooked prasad—khichri—on the Ashtami day, and about 5,000 on other days. The entire celebration was completed peacefully.



Kumari Puja at Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka

Achievements

Nishant Prabhakar, a student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**, stood first in the National Level Science Seminar on *Conservation of Biodiversity: Prospects and Concerns* held at Visvesaraya Industrial and Technological Museum, Bangalore, on 6 October.

The college team of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Saradapitha, Belur**, was placed second at the State Level Inter-College Youth Parliament Competition organized by the Department of Parliamentary Affairs, Government of West Bengal.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar's school team was adjudged outstanding at the Tripura State Level Children's Science Congress in October.

News from Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai, as a part of its diamond jubilee celebrations, organized a two-day exhibition on 6 and 7 October, highlighting the activities of the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, and recent developments in science, commerce, and humanities. Nearly 1,500 students visited the exhibition.

Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore, conducted a written quiz competition on Sri Ramakrishna's life and message in which 91,000 students from 715 schools in 24 districts of Karnataka participated.

Relief

Ramakrishna Mission centres continued relief operations in flood-affected areas of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Orissa, and West Bengal. Details of relief materials distributed are as follows:

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Rajahmundry: 1,246 blankets, 623 saris and an equal number of lungis, mats and trunks to 623 families of Inavilli and Mummidivaram Mandals in East Godavari district.

Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot: 5,000 kg

rice and dal, 12,500 kg wheat flour, 625 kg edible oil, 375 kg spices, 1,250 saris, and 1,250 chaddars to flood-affected people of Ahmedabad, Anand, and Kheda districts.

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Bhubaneswar: 1,301 tarpaulins to 1,301 families in Kendrapara district.

Ramakrishna Math, Puri: 9,608 kg chira and 720 kg sugar to 15,013 persons of 34 villages in Puri district.

Ramakrishna Math, Antpur: 10,506 plates of cooked food and 12,550 kg chira to people of Jaynagar and Balaichak areas.

Ramakrishna Mission Calcutta Students' Home, Belgharia: 4,760 kg chira, 476 kg sugar, 18,080 packets of biscuits and 1,12,300 water-purifying halazone tablets to 4,760 flood-affected persons of Paschim Mayapur, Chaitanya school, Malopara, and Basakpara areas of Navadwip in Nadia district.

Ramakrishna Math, Ichapur: 81,450 kg chira, 8,200 kg sugar, 625 kg bleaching powder, and two lakh halazone tablets to 25,875 families of 106 villages of Khanakul I and II blocks in Hooghly district.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachi: 23,900 plates of cooked food, 80 kg biscuits, 25,000 kg chira, and 4,600 kg sugar to 30,524 persons of 29 villages of Berhampore and Kandi blocks in Murshidabad district; and medical relief to 2,647 persons of 3 villages in Berhampore block.

Distress Relief: The following centres distributed various items to poor and needy persons of nearby areas: **Ramakrishna Mission, Agartala**: 284 saris, 216 dhotis, and 411 children's garments. **Ramakrishna Math, Cooch Behar**: 100 saris, 135 dhotis, 50 mosquito-nets, and 60 woollen chaddars. **Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, Dinajpur**: 290 dhotis, 680 saris, 100 chaddars, and 500 kg rice. **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Seva Samiti, Karimganj**: 65 dhotis and 250 saris. **Ramakrishna Math, Puri**: 1,000 blankets, 107 saris, 140 school uniforms, 197 shirts, and 28 assorted garments. ~